ATTRIBUTIONS OF TRACKED, AT-RISK, MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS:
ISOLATION OF ALIENATED AND MARGINAL STUDENTS AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

By

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The purpose of this study was to determine the
attributions of at-risk students who had been tracked into
an alternative program at the middle-school level and to
identify the implications for school organization. In this
study the attributions of at-risk students were compared
and contrasted within the framework of Weiner's theory of
achievement motivation and emotion utilizing the dimensions
of locus of causality, controllability, and stability as
well as within the context of tracking, at-risk, and
attribution literature in general.

A case study approach using descriptive methods of
data collected was used. In this study an embedded,
single-case design was utilized. The overall unit of
analysis was the alternative education setting. Two
schools were chosen as subunits of analysis. One rural and
one urban school were chosen in order to explore possible

differences and similarities within divergent settings; faculty and staff were observed and interviewed. At another level of analysis, two students were chosen from each school for observation and interview, allowing for in-depth exploration of students' attributions.

Observations and interviews were conducted over the course of approximately 6 months in the 1990-1991 school year, and follow-up interviews were conducted in the fall of the 1991-1992 school year. Included in this study was unstructured interview time in an attempt to gain the maximum amount of information possible and to allow participants the opportunity to introduce information they believed to be relevant. Pattern-matching was utilized as the primary mode of data analysis.

Within Weiner's framework, all four students attributed negative events to unstable or uncontrollable causes, allowing them to maintain a positive self-concept. Successes were mostly viewed as the result of increased effort, rather than innate ability. The rural program provided individualized attention and, thus, produced more positive affective and academic gains for those students than did the urban program. The findings suggest that programs that track at-risk students need to be carefully designed and monitored in order to provide individualized attention, qualified instructors, opportunities for student success, and appropriate behavioral and academic training.

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The "at-risk" population in the educational system of
the United States is growing rapidly (Bryk & Thum, 1989;
Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The disadvantages suffered by
dropouts in the job market are increasing (Catterall &
Stern, 1986). Stricter graduation requirements may be
causing more students to fail to complete school (Archer &
Dresden, 1987; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986; Tanner,
1989).

Research into the at-risk and dropout problem has
focused on the high-school-aged student and quantitative
data collection (Tidwell, 1988). Much of this research has
been based on the "High School and Beyond" study (see Jones
et al., 1983). There are many research reports describing
the characteristics of dropouts; attributes of students
considered likely to dropout include low socioeconomic
status, aggressive behavior, low academic achievement,
nonparticipation in school-related activities, high
absenteeism, Hispanic or black ancestry, retention of at
least one grade level, inadequate social skills, or being
male (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Levin, 1989;
Rumberger, 1983; Svec, 1986; Valverde, 1987; Wells, 1990).

There are few qualitative studies reported, however, that were designed to investigate the behaviors and motivations of at-risk students prior to dropping out, particularly at the middle-school level (Catterall & Stern, 1986; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1988). Students who drop out tend to exhibit combinations of risk factors (Wells, 1990). Why do some students drop out of school, although others who seem equally at risk stay in school? Societal changes are causing many students to drop out at a younger age (LeCompte, 1987); however, there has been little research on the at-risk problem at the middle-school level (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Rumberger, 1987).

This research is a case study of the at-risk phenomenon in the middle-school level. Examination of the predicament of at-risk youth requires intensive investigation into the problem; most previous research has only superficially investigated the issue (Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986). "We advocate a comprehensive and sustained effort to examine the dropout problem. . . . The failure to understand the problem will guarantee a great deal of wasted effort on the part of educators and the continued squandering of human resources" (Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986, p. 438).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the
attributions of at-risk students who had been tracked into
an alternative program at the middle-school level and to
identify the implications for school organization.
Interviews with faculty and staff added to the contextual
picture of the school program and at-risk tracking. There
is little research reported on the process by which young
people become at risk in our educational system. This
study compared and contrasted the attributions of at-risk
students within the framework of Weiner's (1979, 1980,
1985) theory of achievement motivation and emotion,
utilizing the dimensions of locus of causality,
controllability, and stability, as well as within the
context of tracking, at-risk, and attribution literature in
general.

Although much quantitative inquiry has been conducted,
qualitative analysis of at-risk students is nearly
nonexistent. A qualitative methodology will add to the
depth of understanding of the at-risk problem.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, terms are defined as
follows:

Ability grouping is the practice of dividing students
by academic capability in order to increase homogeneity
(e.g., gifted, regular, and low tracks).

Alternative program is an in-school program with a student-teacher ratio below 18:1, designed to provide intensive classroom help to students who have been targeted by the school as being at risk of dropping out.

At-risk students are students who have been identified by the school staff as being in danger of not completing high school. In this study, the at-risk students are enrolled in special programs designed to increase the chances of their staying in school through graduation.

Attribution theory is the general body of social psychology literature which attempts to formalize the everyday rules that people use to make judgments about behaviors and motivations of self and others. "Attribution refers to the process of inferring or perceiving the dispositional properties of entities in the environment" (Kelley, 1967, p. 193).

Controllability is a dimension of causality determined by the amount of volitional or optional control that may be exerted by the individual.

Curriculum tracking is the practice of grouping students according to interests and/or professional goals (i.e., college preparatory, vocational-technical, or general diploma).

Dropout is a youth who fails to graduate from high school within two years of his or her cohort class and is not enrolled in school.

Locus of causality is a dimension of causality characterized by familiar location of a cause, either internal or external to the individual.

Stability is a dimension of causality distinguished by temporal nature, varying from invariant (stable) to variant (unstable).

Rationale for the Study

The costs of dropping out--educational, social, and economic--in American society are staggering (Dollar, 1983; Levin, 1989; Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986; Rumberger, 1983). Levin (1972) estimated nearly $80 billion in lost tax revenues, welfare and unemployment, and crime and crime prevention costs for high school dropouts between the ages of 25 and 34. Collectively, society suffers from increased rates of crime, the financial burdens of public assistance, lost employment revenues, and costs of rehabilitation.

For the individual, the cost of dropping out may include loss of self-esteem, deficiency of skills needed to compete successfully in the job market, and lost opportunities for social and professional development (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). This is not to say that all dropouts become criminals or remain continually unemployed. However, as the median age of dropouts decreases and the skills needed in the job market increase, prospects for dropouts become bleak. Alleviating the dropout problem has become a primary concern for educators.

Examining the context of becoming at-risk and the
developmental process involved may help produce an
adaptation of Weiner's attributional model which could be
used with at-risk students.

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

The purpose of this study was to determine the
attributions of at-risk students who had been tracked into
an alternative program at the middle-school level and to
identify the implications for school organization.
Interviews with faculty and staff added to the contextual
picture of the school program and at-risk tracking. There
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study compared and contrasted the attributions of at-risk
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1985) theory of achievement motivation and emotion,
utilizing the dimensions of locus of causality,
controllability, and stability as well as within the
context of tracking, at-risk, and attribution literature in
general.

Examination of the at-risk phenomenon from a
qualitative perspective will help provide answers as to why
students become at risk; without this knowledge, educators
continue to address the problem from an adult perspective
only. The data that will provide a solution must be

collected from the students (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, &
White, 1988).

Answers to the at-risk problem can be found, in part,
in research into the perspectives of students and teachers
and parents of the world around them and how those
perceptions affect behavior. Labeling students as at-risk
from characteristics they possess leads to ineffective
programs with no clear treatment focus.

Significance of the Study

By identifying how at-risk students perceive
themselves and others, and how those perceptions
subsequently affect their behavior, educators can retrain
students to perceive both self and others more accurately
and to modify their behavior. A developmental model that
can be successfully applied to explain at-risk behaviors
would provide the basis for prevention and intervention in
the school setting.

Some of the behavioral mechanisms that contribute to
the state of being at risk have been identified through
completion of this study. Attribution theory, from the
field of social psychology, provided a theoretical basis
from which to begin examination of the at-risk phenomenon.
That is, what are the attributions of self and others as
experienced by at-risk students? How are they perceived by
others in the school setting? Such knowledge will
contribute to a developmental model and recommendations for

ameliorating the current, growing crisis of at-risk students.

A case study approach also provided insight into the organizational aspects of at-risk programs. Because of the proliferation of programs that track at-risk students outside the traditional school structure, research data needs to be collected that document the effects of such grouping programs.

Questions of the Study

The data in this study were collected in two schools using a case-study approach. Although any attempt to generalize this study's results should be considered by comparison to the settings and methodology presented here, the following research questions, grounded within the literature on at risk, dropouts, tracking, and attribution theory, guided the data collection in this study:

1. Considering Weiner's three dimensions of locus of causality, controllability, and stability, does attribution theory provide a framework for explaining and predicting the behaviors of at-risk students?

2. Do students in at-risk programs demonstrate a propensity to attribute <u>causality</u> of negative events externally?

3. Do students in at-risk programs view themselves as in <u>control</u> of the events that affect their lives?

4. Do at-risk students perceive of causal events as stable or unstable?

Study Limitations

The data in this study were collected utilizing ethnographic techniques. The results of this study are limited in the generalizations that can be drawn because of the use of qualitative methodology. Any attempt to generalize to other situations should be considered by comparison to the contexts represented in this study. The specific methodological constraints are described in Chapter III.

A second limitation of this study was the time of the year of data collection. Beginning the study near the end of the academic year prevented observation of the development of subjects' behavior patterns within the alternative program from the beginning of the school year. This was mediated to some extent, however, by the use of multiple observations and interviews over a 6-month period and follow-up interviews in the subsequent school year.

Outline of the Study

Chapter II contains a review of the literature on tracking, at-risk students, and attribution theory and includes potential implications for the at-risk. The methodology of the study is detailed in Chapter III. Findings of the study are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter

V contains conclusions and implications of the study's results as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II
A LITERATURE REVIEW: SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND TRACKING,
AT-RISK PROGRAMS, AND ATTRIBUTION THEORY

School Organization and Tracking

No two schools are the same. Factors such as local,
state, and federal political agendas, community pressures,
parent involvement, student characteristics, and
faculty/staff commitment and experience all combine to make
each school program unique (Newmann, 1989). In addition,
schools are constantly changing in an attempt to conform to
changes in society (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986).
Students enter the school system with varying backgrounds,
abilities, and expectations.

In an effort to cope with the diverse characteristics
and abilities of students, educators devised methods of
sorting or tracking students into groups--hoping to make
teaching and learning easier (Oakes, 1983). Because
students differ in knowledge, skills, and learning rate, it
seems logical that grouping them according to those
attributes would provide instructional efficiency (Goodlad,
1984). The teacher should be able to pace the lesson
appropriately and supply curriculum at the correct level of
difficulty. Tracking has been used in the school system
since the 1800s, when teachers began grouping students

within the one-room schoolhouse according to their
abilities and interests (Oakes, 1987).

There are two basic types of tracking--ability or
achievement tracking and curriculum tracking (Sedlak,
Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986). Ability grouping
arranges students by perceived ability, usually measured by
IQ scores, ranking on standardized tests, teacher
recommendations, academic achievement, or a combination of
these. Students may be assigned to gifted, regular, or
remedial tracks for all subjects, or may be selected out
for various subjects. Practices vary widely from school to
school. Some school systems begin ability grouping at the
elementary level; others begin tracking at the middle
school or junior high level.

Curriculum tracking classifies students by outcome
goals, for example, college preparation, vocational-
technical, or general diploma. Curriculum tracking is most
widely used at the high-school level.

Slavin (1989) identified two types of tracking--
between-class or within-class. Between-class grouping is
identified by non-random assignment to classes. For
example, ability assignments as well as departmentalization
are between-class groupings. Within-class grouping may
include ability grouping (reading or math groups, for
example), mastery learning, or cooperative learning
(heterogeneous subgrouping). Slavin (1987) argued that

much of the dissent over the results of grouping is due to research that fails to recognize tracking as several distinct practices. Similarly, Gamoran (1987b, 1989) asserted that successful resolution of the tracking debate requires quantified differentiation of types of grouping and methods of instruction within the classroom.

Research on grouping arrangements has been conducted for nearly a century (Slavin, 1989). Over 20 years ago, the National Education Association (1968) reported that "despite its increasing popularity, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence to support the use of ability grouping as an instructional arrangement in the public schools" (p. 44).

Although much of the reported research indicates that tracking has little or no positive result in most situations, the practice continues to be widespread (Hallinan, 1987a; Oakes, 1986, 1989; Trimble & Sinclair, 1987). Opponents have argued that tracking perpetuates preexisting racial and economic inequalities (England, Meier, & Fraga, 1988; Oakes, 1985, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1976). In addition, tracking may produce lower self-esteem, and higher incidence of school misconduct, drop-out rates, and delinquency (Goodlad, 1984; see also Esposito, 1973.) Ability and curriculum groupings also tend to persist over long periods of time and restrict access to educational opportunities (Hallinan, 1987b; Rosenbaum, 1980).

<u>Academic Achievement and Tracking: Empirical Findings</u>

Nevi (1987) argued that "research supports tracking" (p. 24). He referred, however, to only one meta-analysis when he concluded that tracking did not provide negative academic achievement for average and below-average students and often afforded significant gains for gifted students.

Kulik and Kulik (1987) conducted a meta-analysis examining a total of 109 studies of between-class grouping programs and within-class grouping programs. They concluded that significant gains were found for students in programs specially designed for the talented/gifted. They also cautioned against acceptance of Slavin's (1987) conclusions.

Slavin (1987), in a review of studies of ability-grouped classes at the elementary level, concluded that the overall effects of ability grouping were near zero for students of all achievement levels. Regrouping by selected subjects (math or reading) provided positive gains if the instructional level and pace were adapted to student performance level and if the regrouping was for only one or two periods per day. Slavin (1989) also concluded that the majority of literature on gifted programs at the elementary level is "small, inconclusive, and methodologically inadequate" (p. 164). Consequently, Slavin argued that justification for tracking high-ability students was currently lacking (1989, 1990b). Slavin (1989) concluded

that successful grouping plans utilize heterogeneous grouping for most of the day, are flexible for student placement, and adapt the level and pace of instruction to the readiness of the group. Slavin (1990b) also argued that the use of gifted programs should be decreased, while increasing the use of cooperative learning methods and, if necessary, differentiating within classes.

In a meta-analysis of 50 studies, Noland and Taylor (1986) judged that ability grouping did not increase academic achievement. Gamoran and Mare (1990), in an analysis utilizing the "High School and Beyond" data, posited that track assignment reinforced academic inequalities among high- and low-SES students. This finding was mediated to some extent by the fact that blacks and females are partly compensated for their initial disadvantages by track assignment and subsequent increased achievement compared to blacks and females who are randomly assigned to tracks.

Kerckhoff (1986), in a study of ability grouping in British secondary schools, examined data from a birth cohort tracked through early adolescence. He concluded that curricular grouping produced significant gains for high-track students and losses for low-track students compared to non-tracked students. In contrast, Natriello, Pallas, and Alexander (1989), using the "High School and Beyond" data, found that students in all tracks made gains.

However, students in the academic (high) track gained more than students in general or vocational tracks. Students in all three tracks gained more than those who dropped out.

In an investigation of minority track assignment, England, Meier, and Fraga (1988) found that nonwhite students were proportionately underrepresented in high tracks, and overrepresented in special education and low tracks. In addition, black students received a disproportionately large share of disciplinary actions.

Vanfossen, Jones, and Spade (1987) found that academic performance was not the only basis for curricular-track placement. Other factors included SES, size limitations in courses, and faculty/staff perception of ability. Their findings strongly supported the contention that students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds have differing access to curriculum.

Slavin (1990a), in a "best-evidence synthesis" of achievement effects of ability grouping in secondary schools, found zero overall achievement effects at all grade levels. Slavin's findings contrasted with some earlier studies, most notably those of Kulik and Kulik (1982, 1984, 1987), which argued that students in high tracks made positive gains, while students in low tracks made no gains or negative gains. Slavin (1990a) reconciled this conflict by arguing that those studies often compared students in existing tracks. No statistical procedure can

adequately control for such large preexisting differences as those that exist between high- and low-track students. Slavin's review included only studies which met a strict set of methodological criteria.

The Affective Domain and Tracking: Review of Research

In an account of high- and low-track eighth-grade students, Metz (1978) described the affective responses of low-track students towards school:

> They took the school as they found it and did not question the administrators' and teachers' right to define what they should learn, how they should learn it, or how they should behave. However, though they accepted these definitions as inevitable, they did not embrace them. . . . They remained alien and separate within it [the school]. (p. 81)

Metz found, in contrast, that high-track students participated in and were committed to the development of classroom activities and discipline. Similarly, in a review of ethnographic research, Gamoran and Berends (1987) found distinct differences between student attitudes and self-perception in different tracks. In addition, teachers perceived high-track students more positively than low-track students.

Eder (1981), in an analysis of a first grade classroom, concluded that lower-ability students were grouped such that they were exposed to conditions less likely to encourage learning. These students experienced a more disruptive learning environment than did the higher-track students.

In support of tracking, Kulik and Kulik (1982) stated,
"students seemed to like their school subjects more when
they studied them with peers of similar ability, and some
students in grouped classes even developed more positive
attitudes about themselves and about school" (p. 426).
This conclusion was based on a review of fifteen studies of
tracking which included self-concept measures. Seven
studies reported higher self-concept for students in
grouped classrooms, while six studies reported higher self-
concept for students in ungrouped classrooms. Kulik and
Kulik did not detail the differences between the studies
which might explain the contrasting conclusions. Their
argument that grouped students exhibit higher self-concept,
therefore, is not convincing. In a 1984 review of
accelerated programs, Kulik and Kulik found no clear
pattern of affective outcomes. Most researchers have
asserted that tracking negatively affects students' self-
esteem and self-concept.

Noland and Taylor (1986), in a meta-analysis of 50
studies conducted between 1967 and 1983, concluded that
ability grouping provided negative affective outcomes in
areas such as self-esteem and self-concept. Gamoran
(1987a) called for further research into the attitudes and
expectations of tracked students (see also Schwartz, 1981).

Tracking the At-Risk Student

Tracking practices have clear implications for structuring programs for students at risk. Although research generally shows few or no positive academic or affective effects from tracking, at-risk programs have created a new form of curriculum tracking. At-risk programs often focus on remedial instruction with minimal emphasis on social skills development. The programs often target students with low self-esteem and failing academic marks. Students are often perceived as special education students, although they are not provided with the same special services.

Catterall (1987) concluded that grouping at-risk students at the high-school level (for a counseling workshop) resulted in little positive gains in performance, persistence, or attitude for the participants. After follow-up conversations with participants, Catterall hypothesized that the program may have resulted in social bonding among the participants that subsequently lead to nonparticipation. "The workshop may have resulted in a cohesive peer group within the school . . . that looked to itself for sources of satisfaction in daily school life, but not to teachers or to regular school activities" (p. 534). Tracking at-risk students in the school setting may result in the type of peer-group bonding suggested by Catterall leading to further alienation and misbehavior.

At-Risk Students and Programs

Approximately 25% of high school students drop out before graduation (Catterall, 1989). However, graduation rates vary widely across racial and economic groups and between urban and rural areas. Dropout rates may exceed 50% in some areas.

The term "at-risk" has been widely used over the past decade with varying definitions. In this study, the term "at-risk" is used to describe students who have been targeted in the school setting as unlikely to graduate from high school. These students have been placed in special programs in an attempt to provide them with more individualized instruction and attention in the hopes of improving their chances of success in school.

Research on the Characteristics of At-Risk Students

Research on students who leave school early has focused primarily on the characteristics of at-risk students or on school intervention programs (Finn, 1989). Students who ultimately drop out tend to exhibit patterns of behavior such as absenteeism, truancy, disruptive classroom behavior, and delinquency (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Levin, 1989; Svec, 1986; Valverde, 1987; Wells, 1990).

Strahan (1988), in a study of academically at-risk seventh graders, concluded that by the seventh grade, marginal students were already well aware of their

inadequacies in school. Strahan studied journal entries of 10 students who were retained at the end of their seventh grade year. He also examined the journals of a comparison group; the comparison group had sixth-grade achievement profiles similar to those of the marginal group but had been more successful in the seventh grade. The marginal group was below average in achievement. The students failed most subjects, were frequently absent, and misbehaved more often than the comparison group. In addition, the marginal students focused on merely surviving in school rather than on succeeding. Teachers perceived the students as capable but lazy.

The focus of researching the personal and social characteristics of dropouts has given many educators the impression that dropouts are "deviant, deficient, or negligent with regard to school. This focus contributes to a pathological view of these youth and deflects attention from the school itself" (Wehlage, 1989, p. 2). Although these characteristics are indicative of the problem, they are merely symptomatic (Wehlage, 1986). Students displaying such behaviors are already in the process of withdrawing from the school system. Services for at-risk students have generally targeted students labeled at risk because of characteristics they possess. Programs often have no rationale or design other than hoping to help students succeed.

Research on At-Risk Programs

Most major studies of at-risk programs have centered on the characteristics of students, not questioning the effectiveness of schools in retaining at-risk students (Wehlage, 1989; Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987). Those studies that have examined at-risk program effectiveness often exhibit poor methodology, incomplete data, or small samples (Slavin, 1989). There is some evidence, however, that some approaches are more effective in serving the needs of the at risk. Coleman and Hoffer (1987), in analyzing the "High School and Beyond" data, concluded that Catholic schools are more effective than public schools at retaining at-risk students. This appears to be because the Catholic schools generally provided more personalized attention and means for student involvement. Programs that are not specialized to deal with the affective consequences of being at risk are ineffective. "Children either labelled 'failure' or faced continuously with little or no prospect of success come to regard themselves as failures" (Goodlad, 1966, p. 11).

Most intervention programs have focused on remediation and affective interaction. However, little consideration has been given to the developmental process of becoming at risk.

Developmental Perspectives

If such behaviors are symptoms of withdrawal, then
what is the developmental process that precedes dropping
out? The literature is meager in this area. Finn (1989)
related two models to explain the process of dropping out:
the frustration-self-esteem model and the participation-
identification model.

Proponents of the frustration-self-esteem model
espouse the view that persistent school failure lowers
self-esteem. In an attempt to experience success, the
individual engages in alternate behaviors--oftentimes
delinquent or, at the least, inappropriate.

> Under conditions of low social control, these
> young people turn to delinquent behavior to raise
> their self-esteem. . . . It follows that, if these
> youngsters' experiences at school were altered
> sufficiently to raise their self-esteem . . .
> their disruptive and delinquent behavior would
> subside. (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 19)

The participation-identification model is
characterized by the idea that students' participation
within the school stimulates feelings of identification in
the school setting. Students who do not participate may
not identify or create a bond in the school setting and are
subsequently at risk of alienation. Finn (1989) stated
that the participation-identification model contains two
major premises.

> First, students who identify with school have an
> internalized conception of belongingness--that
> they are discernibly part of the school
> environment and that school constitutes an

important part of their own experience. And
second, these individuals value success in school-
relevant goals. (p. 123)

Although these two models may serve as a starting

point for identifying the developmental process of becoming

at risk, neither model suffices as a comprehensive

framework. In fact, Finn recommended additional research

(focusing on the student) in order to document:

(a) the form and extent of participation among
students as they mature through the grades,
(b) the ways in which participation and school
outcomes are translated into levels of
identification with school,
(c) the role of successful outcomes and
identification in mediating further
participation, and
(d) the relationship of these two central
constructs to other correlates of school
performance, including educational aspirations,
expectations, attitudes toward school and school
subjects, and academic self-concept. (p. 136)

The Background of Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is a collection of hypotheses and

frameworks, anchored in the field of social psychology,

that attempts to explain and predict how people perceive

the causes of events and how they subsequently behave.

Attribution theorists postulate that individuals, after

observing an event and reviewing known facts, construct an

attribution(s) about why the event occurred. The

attribution(s) subsequently affects the individual's

behavior and/or emotions. People make attributions about

other people and situations in an attempt to make sense and

order out of events. Attribution theorists propose that by

understanding why people make certain attributions, an individual can better predict and control how others behave and react emotionally (see Babcock, 1989; Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979; Harvey, Weary, & Stanley, 1985; Hewstone, 1983, 1989; Kassin & Baron, 1985; Shaver, 1983; Young & Marks, 1986).

Contributors to attribution theory have concentrated on three major questions: (a) What are the antecedents of an attribution? (b) What are the contents of the attribution process? and (c) What are the consequences of the attributions? (Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979). There are many different attribution models, but the following sections of this chapter will review the basic contributors to attribution theory as they apply to this study.

Heider's Naive Psychology of Action

Fritz Heider's (1958) work The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations formed the basis for what was to become known as attribution theory. Heider was interested in the perceptions of "naive" people in everyday life. He argued that common-sense psychology was important to scientific research for two reasons. First, our common-sense perceptions guide our actions in everyday life and must therefore be taken into account by the scientist.

> One can talk about a "naive psychology" which gives us the principles we use to build up our picture of the social environment and which guides our reactions to it. An explanation of this behavior, therefore, must deal with common-sense psychology regardless of whether its assumptions and principles prove valid under scientific scrutiny. If a person believes that the lines in

his palm foretell his future, this belief must be
taken into account in explaining certain of his
expectations and actions. (p. 5)

Second, Heider maintained that the intuitive
understanding of the naive psychologist could help provide
truths of value to the scientific psychologist. "Fruitful
concepts and hunches for hypotheses lie dormant and
unformulated in what we know intuitively" (pp. 5-6).

Heider's hypotheses about causation were based on
three assumptions. First, understanding a person's
behavior requires thorough description of how the person
perceives his own world. Second, people want to predict
and order their environment. Third, people look for
certain properties or dispositions in others in order to
explain their behavior.

These dispositional properties are generally stable,
predictable, and controllable, and allow the individual to
structure his or her world in an organized manner. Humans,
by nature, must create some order or schema to make sense
of their world.

Man is usually not content simply to register the
observables that surround him; he needs to refer
them as far as possible to the invariances of his
environment. Second, the underlying causes of
events, especially the motives of other persons,
are the invariances of the environment that are
relevant to him; they give meaning to what he
experiences and it is these meanings that are
recorded in his life space, and are precipitated
as the reality of the environment to which he then
reacts. (p. 81)

These dispositional properties include factors within the person and within the environment. Examples include ability and task difficulty. Heider envisioned the results of an action to be a combination of forces within and without the individual (p. 82).

Heider (1958) described can (ability) and trying (effort) as dispositional properties of the individual, whereas difficulty and luck are environmental dispositions. Ability and difficulty are relatively stable properties, that is, one would not expect them to vary from instance to instance for the same task. Effort and luck, however, are unstable.

The attribution process is subject to potential biases or misattributions. A person may attribute one's actions according to his or her own desires or needs. This is known as egocentric attribution. Examples include claiming to be unable to do something that one does not wish to do, blaming fate for one's actions, taking credit for doing something or not doing something (i.e., stealing) when in fact the opportunity was unavailable. Misattribution may occur when information regarding an action is incomplete or when egocentric biases distort the process (see also Ross, 1977; Weary, 1981; Zuckerman, 1979.)

Jones and Davis's Theory of Correspondent Inferences

Jones and Davis (1965) expanded on Heider's (1958) work. They proposed to "construct a theory which

systematically accounts for a perceiver's inferences about
what an actor was trying to achieve by a particular action"
(p. 222).   Jones and Davis's definition is as follows:

> Correspondence refers to the extent that the act
> and the underlying characteristic or attribute are
> similarly described by the inference. . . .
> Correspondence of inference declines as the action
> to be accounted for appears to be constrained by
> the setting in which it occurs. (p. 223)

For example, if Susie spends a good deal of time every
day helping Beth with her math assignment, one might infer
that Susie is a considerate and cooperative young girl.
However, if Susie earned extra recess time or improved her
grade by helping Beth, one would probably attribute her
behavior less to her personality.   In the first case, one
infers a high correspondence between Susie's behavior and
her personality, whereas in the second situation there is a
belief that there is less correspondence between her
behavior and her personality because of constraints
inherent in the situation--that is, the rewards associated
with the helping behavior (Smith, Gelfand, Hartmann, &
Partlow, 1979).

Jones and Davis considered the element of choice to be
fundamental to their theory.   All situations involve
choices of behavior with different effects; in fact,
situations generally involve multiple effects for various
potential choices made by the actor.   The theory of
correspondent inference is based on the assumption that
effects common to different choices are not factors in

deciding which action to take. Instead, it is the noncommon effects that are informational about the choice the actor makes.

For example, Mr. Boone was considering buying a house and had narrowed his decision down to two houses. House A was $125,000, a 15 minute drive from his work, and nicely landscaped. House B shared all the same attributes. Although it might be assumed that all these features influenced Mr. Boone's decision in narrowing down his search because both houses share those qualities, that knowledge does not help make any inferences about his ultimate decision. One needs to know, instead, what the houses do <u>not</u> have in common to infer something about his decision regarding which house to buy.

In addition to knowing the noncommon effects of an action, it is also helpful to know the assumed social desirability of those effects. In the above example, house A may have a hot tub, house B does not. This knowledge may be helpful to the extent that it is assumed Mr. Boone would enjoy having a hot tub. If Mr. Boone buys house A, it might be assumed that the hot tub influenced his decision if it is believed that a hot tub was a socially desirable benefit of owning the house. However, the maximum knowledge is to be gained when considering effects <u>low</u> in social desirability. If it is assumed that most people would enjoy having a hot tub, then one learns little new

about Mr. Boone by virtue of the fact that he would enjoy one also. "The fewer distinctive reasons a person might have for an action (assuming he has some) and the less these reasons are widely shared in the culture, the more informative that action is concerning the characteristics of the person" (Kelley, 1967, pp. 208-209).

Jones and Davis (1965) introduced two further concepts to the study of attribution: relevance and personalism. Relevance refers to the extent to which an individual's choices effect the perceiver--either positively or negatively. In general, individuals tend to be favorably disposed towards someone whose actions benefit them and negatively disposed towards someone whose actions hinder or disturb them. Although an effect may be relevant to an individual, it may or may not have been intended to affect that individual by the original actor. This is the concept of personalism: "to distinguish between choices which are conceivably affected by the presence of the perceiver and choices which are not conceivably so affected" (p. 247). High relevance and high (perceived) personalism directly increase the extremity of the individual's evaluation of the actor.

Kelley's Covariation Principle

Kelley (1967) added to the foundations of attribution theory by defining four criteria for external attributions. Kelley argued that an individual, when making an

attribution, employs certain analytic criteria to verify
that "the impression reflects the inherent properties of
the entity and not his own characteristics or some peculiar
interactions with the entity" (p. 197). Those criteria are

    1. Distinctiveness: the impression is
    attributed to the thing if it uniquely occurs
    when the thing is present and does not occur in
    its absence.
    2. Consistency over time: each time the thing
    is present, the individual's reaction must be the
    same or nearly so.
    3. Consistency over modality: his reaction must
    be consistent even though his mode of interaction
    with the thing varies.
    4. Consensus: attributes of external origin are
    experienced the same way by all observers. (p.
    197)

Kelley postulated that the extent to which a person's
attributions match the criteria of distinctiveness,
consistency, and consensus determines the individual's
confidence of attributions about the world (see also Dix &
Herzberger, 1983; Howard & Levinson, 1985.)

    Kelley also specified five sources of error in the
process of attribution, borrowed partly from Heider's
(1958) work. Kelley (1967) stated that error may result
from ignoring the relevant situation, making egocentric
assumptions, relevant effects have affective significance
for the observer, the surrounding situation is misleading,
deliberate investigator attempts to induce error. Kelley's
work, especially that on misattribution, has provided the
basis for much research in the field of causal attribution.

(See also DiVitto & McArthur, 1978; Howard & Levinson, 1985; Kelley & Michela, 1980.)

The Contributions of Bernard Weiner

Although the attribution theories of Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1967) focused on the process and antecedent of an individual's inferences, Bernard Weiner (1972, 1974) developed a theory that centered on the consequences of causal attributions. Weiner contributed a cognitive perspective to the research on attribution theory focusing on academic striving.

Weiner's Theory of Achievement Motivation

Weiner (1972, 1974) examined achievement-oriented behavior and the attributions of success and failure. His theory was originally known as the theory of achievement motivation. He initially postulated four major categories of causal attribution: ability, task difficulty, luck, and effort. These four categories were examined within the context of two causal dimensions: locus of control (internal-external) and stability (low-high). Ability and effort are classified as internal within the dimension of locus of control. Task difficulty and luck, however, are categorized as external locus because it is assumed that the individual has little control over them. Luck and effort are perceived as unstable because they may vary from trial to trial, whereas task difficulty and ability are

stable because they would probably not vary across time for a particular task.

Weiner's Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion

Weiner (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1987) later reconceptualized his achievement theory of motivation and emotion within three dimensions: locus of causality, stability, and controllability. Locus of causality may be internal or external. For example, lack of effort is an internal attribution, whereas a too difficult task is external. Stability is the temporal nature of a cause-- enduring or changing. Lack of ability is construed as stable; bad luck is unstable. Controllability is the degree of volitional influence that can be exerted over a cause. Effort can be controlled, for example, whereas ability cannot.

Each dimension is associated with a number of psychological consequences. Emotions such as pity, shame, gratitude, hopelessness (hopefulness), pride (self-esteem), guilt, and anger result from the individual's attributions of causality within Weiner's three dimensions.

The locus dimension affects self-esteem. Attributions to internal factors for success increase self-worth (Robison-Awana, Kehle, & Jenson, 1986), whereas attributions to internal factors for failure decrease self-esteem. The stability dimension relates to changes in expectancy of success and failure and also regulates

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affective reactions. Feelings of hopelessness may result

when the future is seen as stable and negative--the

individual sees no hope of change for the better. Finally,

the controllability dimension of causality affects

sentiments and evaluations of others.

> If another person fails or is in need of aid
> because of a controllable cause, such as lack of
> effort, then that person often elicits anger and
> is negatively evaluated. On the other hand, if
> failure or need is due to an uncontrollable cause
> such as a physical handicap, then that person
> elicits sympathy and is positively evaluated.
> (Weiner, 1983, p. 531)

Changes in expectancy of success, Weiner (1985)

claimed, were influenced by the perceived stability of the

cause of the event. He proposed three corollaries to what

he termed the "expectancy principle."

> 1. If the outcome of an event is ascribed to a
> stable cause, then that outcome will be
> anticipated with increased certainty, or with an
> increased expectancy, in the future.
> 2. If the outcome of an event is ascribed to an
> unstable cause, then the certainty or expectancy
> of that outcome may be unchanged or the future may
> be anticipated to be different from the past.
> 3. Outcomes ascribed to stable causes will be
> anticipated to be repeated in the future with a
> greater degree of certainty than are outcomes
> ascribed to unstable causes. (p. 559)

Bar-Tal (1982) summarized the attribution process as

follows:

> Pupils who tend to attribute success to internal,
> mainly stable or controllable, causes, and who
> attribute failure to internal-unstable-
> controllable causes, tend to exhibit adaptive,
> mastery-oriented achievement behavior. That is,
> they tend to approach rather than avoid
> achievement tasks, tend to persist in the face of
> failure, and tend to perform achievement tasks

with greater intensity. Pupils who tend to
attribute success to external causes and failure
to internal-stable-uncontrollable causes show a
very different pattern. These pupils tend to
exhibit maladaptive, helpless achievement
behavior. That is, they tend to avoid achievement
tasks, tend to give up in the face of failure and
do not perform achievement tasks with great
intensity. (p. 190)

Weiner (1983) also argued that it is important to

consider attributions within the framework of the subject's

perception. That is, although effort may generally be

considered unstable, that may change to a stable trait if

the person views himself or herself as lazy.

Weiner maintained that, although an attribution

perspective might seem to be simple logic, the framework of

attribution theory was not only sound but also valuable to

researchers.

When critics charge that an attributional approach
is "mere" common sense, they are exclaiming that
the relations pointed out or predicted by the
theory represent shared knowledge. . . . That the
individual parts or components [of the theory] are
naively shared underscores their veridicality,
thus further supporting the certainty of the
empirical relations and thereby providing a strong
foundation for theory building. (Weiner, 1985, p.
570)

Weiner's Achievement Motivation Model: Empirical Support

Within an academic context, Weiner's model has been

generally supported (Cramer, 1989; Weiner, 1985). Research

has focused on the four categories of ability, task

difficulty, luck, and effort within the dimensions of locus

of control and stability (see also Stipek & Weisz, 1981).

Rizley (1978) reported that depressed college students rated dispositional (internal) factors to be more important for failure but less important for success than did nondepressed students. Apparently depressed students are more likely to blame themselves for failure, although less likely to take credit for success (see also Self, 1990).

In studies of youths' (mean age 15.6 years) perceptions of delinquency, Abrams, Simpson, and Hogg (1987) found that young people attribute delinquent actions to external (situational) terms rather than to individual attributes. The authors concluded that experience of and associations with delinquency (for example, males and urban residents) cause individuals to attribute situationally, whereas those less close (females and rural residents) attribute causality more to internal factors (for example, mental instability or criminality).

Weiner's Achievement Motivation and Emotion Model:
    Empirical Findings

Weiner's revised theory (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985) focused on the affective reactions of individuals to success and failure. Weiner theorized that the affective reactions governed by locus of causality, stability, and controllability should hold true in social settings as well as academic ones. However, the majority of the research employing Weiner's revised model utilized achievement situations (Evans & Engelberg, 1988). Research relating

Weiner's model to affect have predominately centered on alcoholism, loneliness, and depression (Guttmann, 1982).

In an investigation of college students' affective reactions to an examination grade, Forsyth and McMillan (1981) found support for Weiner's three-dimensional model (locus of causality, stability, and controllability). However, they believed the controllability dimension to be more important than the stability dimension in determining affect. This is in contrast with Weiner's (1979) proposal. Guimond, Begin, and Palmer (1989) agreed with Weiner's theory, in part, but stated that actual affective responses were mediated by cultural background. For example, social science students (with, presumably, increased knowledge of economic and social disadvantage) were less likely to attribute failure dispositionally than were the poor and unemployed. Willig, Harnisch, Hill, and Maehr (1983), in a cross-cultural study of grades four to eight, also found that causal attributions and motivational needs differ for Anglo, Hispanic, and black students.

Similarly, Kashiwagi (1986) asserted that Japanese adolescents are more likely to attribute failure to lack of effort or other internal factors while they are more likely to attribute success to external factors. In addition, Japanese consider luck to be a strong mediating influence for success or failure. The individual's perception of luck does not relieve him or her of the responsibility to

try hard (effort), but luck may cause unanticipated effects. Kashiwagi believed this negative attributional pattern to be cross-nationally atypical; he speculated that the Japanese evaluate themselves negatively because their culture glorifies modesty and criticizes individuality.

Weiner and Handel (1985) reported that, in the laboratory setting, children as young as 5 and 6 years of age are able to discriminate between the emotions that would be elicited from lack of trying (anger) versus lack of ability (pity). However, only older children acted on this knowledge. That is, they were less likely to reveal responses that they believed would cause anger in another person. Strayer (1986) found, in accordance with Weiner and Handel (1985), that young children (two groups, mean ages 53.2 months and 91.2 months) understood that certain situations provoke certain emotional responses such as anger or happiness.

Kramer (1985) found that gifted middle-school females attribute achievement to effort and failure to lack of effort. The students' beliefs about success and failure developed within a framework based on their school experiences--specifically student-teacher relationships, social competence, and developing self-concept.

Covington and Omelich (1985) proposed a resolution of Weiner's theory with self-worth theory in their study of undergraduate students. They postulated that the emotion

of shame shares an ability-linked component (humiliation) and an effort-linked component (guilt). In addition, the authors contended that the coping method of the student (failure-avoiding or failure-accepting) would influence the strength of the ability/effort to affect linkage.

Similarly, Burke, Hunt, and Bickford (1985) reported support for Weiner's revised model but suggested consolidating Weiner's model with self-theory. In a study of college students, they concluded that students with high self-esteem internalized successful results on an examination more than did those students with low self-esteem. They elaborated on Weiner's theory, however, to say that "internalization of causality, when it involves attributions to stable dispositional sources, is qualified by consistency of feedback with existing self-esteem and concomitant expectancies for performance" (pp. 328-329).

Applications of attribution theory for therapy commonly include attempts to change ascriptions of failure to lack of effort, bad luck, or excessive task difficulty rather than lack of ability (Weiner, 1988). Weiner asserted, however, that subjects would benefit from being directed to focus on errors of omission and commission. Then, "the client directly reaches a new conclusion by paying attention to other causal antecedents" (p. 103). Young and Marks (1986) posited that between counselor and client there should be a match on "attributions of

responsibility for both the problem and solution" (p. 327) in order to avoid misunderstanding and conflict (see also Lepper & Dafoe, 1979).

<center>Summary</center>

The majority of researchers on tracking have reported that grouping students by perceived ability or curriculum does not produce significant academic gains. In addition, low-track students may suffer from lower self-esteem and self-concept than non-tracked students of similar ability. One of the common characteristics of at-risk students is poor social skills and low self-esteem. The practice of tracking at-risk students, then, may have increased negative effect on students self-concept unless the alternative program provides considerable attention to the affective domain.

Although most of the previously cited research supports Weiner's Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion, there are some serious limitations to the application of these studies. Most of the research was conducted with college or high school students. In addition, the subjects were usually given hypothetical information with the experiments conducted in a laboratory setting. The present study was designed to apply Weiner's model to a specific population--middle-school, at-risk students. Interviewing students in the school setting over a period of months allows insight into the perspective of

the students. Weiner (1982) called for further study in

this manner:

> If one wishes to study the content of emotions,
> emotional life, and the meaning of emotions, then
> one must turn to those who experience these
> feelings. . . . There should be greater attention
> paid to the emotions experienced in everyday life.
> (p. 205)

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the
attributions of at-risk students who had been tracked into
an alternative program at the middle-school level and to
identify the implications for school organization. This
chapter contains a description of the research methods of
this study of the attributions of middle-school adolescents
tracked into alternative programs for at-risk students. A
case study approach using descriptive methods of data
collection was used. The following research questions,
grounded within the literature on at-risk, dropouts,
tracking, and attribution theory, guided the data
collection in this study:

1. Considering Weiner's three dimensions of locus of
causality, controllability, and stability, does attribution
theory provide a framework for explaining and predicting
the behaviors of at-risk students?

2. Do students in at-risk programs demonstrate a
propensity to attribute causality of negative events
externally?

3. Do students in at-risk programs view themselves as
in control of the events that affect their lives?

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4.   Do at-risk students perceive of causal events as
stable or unstable?

In order to investigate these questions, a qualitative
methodology was selected.

Qualitative Research

Jacob (1987) argued that "one of the most exciting
areas for future research is adapting qualitative
traditions to the study of naturally occurring cognitive
behavior in classrooms" (p. 39) because "qualitative
traditions offer researchers a richer and fuller
understanding of education" (p. 38).

Qualitative research, with its variety of data
collection techniques, has great potential for making new
and significant contributions to what is currently known
about the process and practice of education (Merriam,
1988).   Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis
provided an opportunity for depth and greater understanding
into the predicament of at-risk students.

The interacting variables observed in many classroom
situations can best be examined holistically.   Qualitative
research allows the investigator to report findings within
the broader context of the situation under study.   "To
divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for
the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance"
(Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 27).

> Descriptive research is undertaken when
> description and explanation . . . are sought, when

it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the
potential causes of behavior, and when variables
are not easily identified or are too embedded in
the phenomenon to be extracted for study.
(Merriam, 1988, p. 7)

Research Design

Case study has long been used in other disciplines; it
has recently begun to be recognized as a valuable and valid
research approach in education (Merriam, 1985). Case study
technique involves exploration of a naturally occurring
individual unit; units of study may be the individual,
classroom, event, or a community, for example (Cohen &
Manion, 1980).

The results of the investigation are written up as
descriptive analyses of the particular unit. There are two
types of case studies: single case and multiple case.
Within each type, there may be holistic (single) or
embedded (multiple) units of analysis (see Yin, 1989). In
this study of attributions of at-risk students who had been
tracked into alternative programs, an embedded, single-case
design was utilized. The overall unit of analysis in this
study was the alternative-education setting. Two schools
were chosen as subunits of analysis. One rural and one
urban school were chosen in order to explore possible
differences and similarities within divergent settings. At
another level of analysis, two students were chosen from
each school to be observed and interviewed. This sampling

technique allowed for in-depth exploration of students'
attributions.

Yin (1989) argued that "the subunits can often add
significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing
the insights into the single case (p. 52). Chassen (1969)
contended that intensive research is preferable over
extensive research (small N versus large N) because "the
. . . investigator has a far greater opportunity to achieve
a sense of direction and steady progress than he could
possibly have in a succession of extensive studies" (p.
39). A case study selects the research issues of interest
and provides rich detail into those relevant issues
(Bromley, 1986; Merriam, 1988).

The case study also allows for a progressive inquiry
into a particular situation. The end product is not a
given before the researcher even begins; instead, the
qualitative approach allows the researcher to follow
emergent meaning and adapt to changes as they arise. Such
an emergent design is crucial for the researcher to
maintain the right to intuit and derive new questions
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The subjective nature of the
situation under examination requires exploration and
interpretation.

Although attribution theory was chosen to guide
initial observations and interviews, the study included
unstructured interview time in an attempt to gain the

maximum amount of information possible and to allow participants the opportunity to introduce information they believed to be relevant. In this study, data were analyzed at each level within the framework of attribution theory and the literature on tracking and at-risk youth.

Methods and Procedures

This study utilized several different data collection techniques, including observation and interview, in an attempt to gain insight into the perception and attributions of at-risk students. One way of "getting inside" the culture is to use different methods of data collection to supplement and corroborate field notes (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), such as interview and photographic exercises. Data collection in this study was based on observation, interview, and photo-elicitation.

Participant observation in qualitative research usually implies some degree of "going native" as a researcher attempts to gain a level of acceptance within the distinct culture under study. The goals of this study and the technique of using repeated interviews demanded a greater level of acceptance and understanding from the subjects than might be needed with other research designs. As such, informal settings and casual attire fostered acceptance from the middle-school students.

>An alternative is to participate with the children not as an authority figure (an adult), but as a quasi-friend. It is difficult for an adult to be accepted by a child as an equal, but you can move

toward being a tolerated insider in children's
society. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 128)

Sampling

The majority of the research focusing on at-risk
students has been conducted with subjects at the high
school level. Many programs, however, have been
implemented in recent years at the middle-school level with
the intention of identifying and treating adolescents at
risk of dropping out before those students reach high
school and are legally old enough to leave school.

There was little research, however, on the attitudes
and attributions of students in such alternative programs.
In this study, the examination of those attitudes and
attributions will contribute to a greater understanding of
the at-risk student. The researcher also interviewed
faculty at both schools.

Data collection was conducted in two middle schools in
the Pacific Northwest. One school is located in the inner
city, the other a rural area. Two programs were chosen in
order to compare and contrast the experiences of at-risk
students in very different school settings (see Lomotey &
Swanson, 1989). Both of the schools in this study have
been designated as middle schools. However, the two
schools differed widely in their size, scheduling, course
offerings, instruction, and program goals. For all
practical purposes, the rural middle school in this study
closely resembled a junior high school. The inner-city

school, however, more closely embraced the middle-school philosophy (see Alexander & George, 1981 for more on middle school philosophy and structure).

For example, the rural school followed a seven-period, seven-teacher schedule with no core classes or team teaching. The inner-city school, in contrast, utilized a three-period humanities core class (either self-contained or team-taught) along with a daily advisory class. The advisory class emphasized study skills, peer relations, and academic guidance. (Descriptions of both schools can be found in Chapter IV.)

It is important to acknowledge the constraints that program structure imposes on special programs. The students in the inner-city alternative program spent at least three periods each day with the core teacher. At the rural school, however, the teacher's alternative class consisted of only one 45-minute period each day.

Each of the schools included a designated at-risk program. The programs' goals and methods were very different, however, as were their student populations. The inner-city program included students with histories of substance abuse, violence, and delinquent behavior, whereas the rural program specifically excluded students with such behaviors in an attempt to help more "motivated" students.

Two students were selected at each school from an at-risk class. Students were selected to participate through

purposive sampling. Merriam (1988) defined purposive sampling (also called criterion-based sampling) as the process of selecting subjects or situations from which one can learn the most. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to investigate both variation and typical attributes within a sample population. At both schools, students were chosen because the teachers believed those students would benefit from individual attention. In addition, students exhibited behaviors which the teachers believed to be similar to that of other students in the programs. Purposive sampling allows selection of subjects to demonstrate the full range of behaviors under investigation. That is, "the object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). Maximum diversity in sampling can not only provide additional detail, but can also corroborate deductions.

At both schools, students were chosen because the teachers believed those students would benefit from individual attention. Students were asked whether they would be interested in participating in a study about middle school students' feelings about school. Using repeated observations, interviews, and photographic exercises over the course of 6 months, case study data were compiled on each of the four participants. In addition,

follow-up interviews were conducted in the fall of the following academic year in order to assess the students' transitions between at-risk and regular programs.

Initially, meetings with the principals of each of the two schools provided details on the two programs. In the inner-city school, the researcher met with the alternative program coordinator and observed the at-risk class for several class periods. The coordinator selected two students (one male, one female) perceived to be typical at-risk students as potential subjects.

The first student, a white, eighth-grade female, was selected because the coordinator perceived her to be a typical at-risk student--experiencing problems with family relations, school attendance, and drug/alcohol abuse. The second student, a black eighth-grade male, was also deemed to be a typical at-risk student. In addition, the student was involved in a street gang. Both students were considered to be bright by both the classroom teacher and program coordinator. After a period of two weeks, however, the gang-involved male had only attended school on one day. Consequently, another student was selected from the class-- also a black, eighth-grade male.

In the rural school, the at-risk program was relatively new and composed of two language arts classes and two mathematics classes. Students were identified as at risk by virtue of their failing grades. Students who

were considered to have severe behavior problems were not placed in the program. The researcher met with the language arts teacher and observations were conducted in two classes on several occasions. The teacher selected two students (one male, one female) perceived to be typical at-risk students for potential subjects. Both were seventh-grade students. According to the teacher, the female was experiencing problems with self-esteem and difficulty forming relationships with her peers. The male appeared confident and friendly, but unmotivated to do his school work. All four students were amenable to participate in a series of formal and informal interviews to be conducted over the remainder of the school year and into the summer. More specific details on the schools, programs, and students are contained in Chapter IV.

Observation

Observation is generally a critical step in the initial collection of data for a qualitative study (Merriam, 1988). Observations lasted from one to three hours for each classroom visit. Each school visit included some general classroom observation time in addition to interviews. Each of the two schools were visited at least 20 times.

Interview

In this study, the researcher primarily used unstructured interviews with the participants in an effort

to draw out opinions and attributions. Occasionally a more
structured format was employed to explore specific issues.
The available attribution theory questionnaires were deemed
inappropriate as the basis for interviews because of their
superficial nature (e.g., Likert-scale design).

Interviews were conducted with the permission of
parents and school personnel. In some instances, the
students were exempted from some classroom work in order to
meet for interviews. Both program teachers were extremely
flexible in allowing students to be interviewed during
class time. Both teachers explained that they believed
that one-to-one time with an adult was more beneficial for
these students than any academic tasks would be. The
researcher spent over 125 hours with the four students over
the course of six months.

Semistructured interview. Some semistructured
interviews were used in order to explore specific topics.
For example, students were asked to describe hypothetical
situations in which they might experience emotions such as
anger, happiness, or shame in order to investigate whether
their responses corresponded with Weiner's attribution
framework.

Unstructured interview. Middle-school students seem
most comfortable with an unstructured format; they will
answer specific questions but are most at ease when
conversing in a less formal manner. Because the success of

an interview is strongly dependent upon the relationship
between the interviewer and respondent (Merriam, 1988), a
casual and nonthreatening atmosphere was provided in all
interview situations. Interviews were conducted in one
corner of the classroom, in the student lounge, or in a
private office.

Photographic interview. A camera record provides a
method of recording information and assessing individual's
perceptions (Collier, 1979).

> Through the insider's view via photography, the
> researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon, and a
> personal knowledge is achieved. The researcher
> begins to "see as they see" and "feel as they
> feel." Thus the purpose of observation is not
> simply description and analysis but understanding.
> (Ziller, 1990, p. 21)

Photography may be used to provide descriptive data
that might not otherwise be available (Damico, 1985;
Ziller, 1990). The use of photographic techniques provided
valuable information from the students that might not
otherwise have been elicited. Using the photographs added
details to help confirm hypotheses.

One way of doing this is to ask subjects to take
photographs that are representative of some aspect of their
lives. The specific directions are dependent upon the
purpose of the study. In this study, students were asked
to take photographs that answered the question "Who am I?"

The subjects were given a camera with 24 film
exposures. The use of the camera was fairly simple;

students were instructed how to use it and demonstrated
their capability to use it before leaving to take their
photographs. The specific directions that were given to
the students are as follows:

> This is a 24 exposure camera that can be used to take
> photographs both outside and indoors. You should take
> at least 10 pictures but may take all 24 if you like.
> You should take pictures that would answer the
> question, "Who am I?" You should not worry about how
> "good" the photographs are. Instead, concentrate on
> taking pictures that show what is important in your
> life. When you finish, return the camera to me and I
> will develop the photographs. Then you will choose 10
> pictures that, viewed together, would represent your
> world. We will discuss why you took those pictures
> and what they mean to you. You may take the pictures
> yourself or have someone else take them for you. I
> will provide duplicates of the pictures for you to
> keep. These pictures will not be shown to anyone else
> or published in any way.

The researcher brought the developed photographs to a
later meeting and asked the student to describe what each
of the photographs meant and in what way they represented
his or her life. Students were told to choose 10
photographs and explain why they would include them in an
album that showed "Who am I?"

Ziller (1990) asserted that there are several benefits
to using this process of photo-elicitation. "Respondents
are able to represent themselves in any framework they
please; the approach is simple; and there is a quality of
rich revealingness about the self-representation" (p. 35).

Record Keeping

Qualitative study requires stringent record keeping.
In this study, observation and interview were the primary

methods of data collection. Field notes of observations,
note-taking after interviews, and transcriptions of
recorded interviews formed the body of data used for
analysis.   Immediately after observations, field notes
were written in order to preserve as accurate an accounting
of the settings and participants as possible. Merriam
(1988) maintained that "participant observation . . . gives
a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when
combined with interviewing . . . allows for a holistic
interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (p.
96).

   Merriam (1988) proposed three primary methods of
recording interview data: tape-recording, note-taking
during interview, and note-taking after interview. Merriam
suggested that tape-recording is generally preferable
because it allows for verbatim transcription for analysis.
Several of the interviews with each subject in this study
were recorded and transcribed. However, all of the
students appeared uneasy whenever the recorder was used.
Similarly, students were much less open when note-taking
was utilized during the interviews. Consequently, note-
taking following the interview was the primary method of
recording that was used.

   Merriam (1988) stated that although there are obvious
problems with this third method of recording, it is
preferable when "writing or recording during an interview

might be intrusive" (p. 81). Subjects provided much more personal data when neither recording or note-taking were used during the interview process. After each interview, reflective notes were recorded, including subject responses, descriptions of subject behavior, and observer comments.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Following data collection, qualitative techniques of data analysis are used to determine patterns or themes. Qualitative, or inductive, data analysis involves sifting through and organizing the data, usually through a process of coding, and then developing themes or looking for patterns in the data (Merriam, 1988).

Coding consists of uncovering similarities in the data, whether that data comes from interview, observation, photographs, or other sources. The data are categorized into workable units. For example, one student might report feelings of anxiety in school immediately prior to testing. Another student may have said that he stopped trying in class because he could not compete with the "smart kids." These responses might be coded as "fear of failure." Meaningful units of description, separated out for analysis, are integrated to build a complete, descriptive picture.

Yin (1989) detailed three dominant modes of analysis for case study design: pattern-matching, explanation-

building, and time series.   In this study, pattern-matching
was utilized as the primary mode of data analysis.   Within
each unit and subunit (total case, school, student),
analysis was conducted for each aspect of Weiner's
attributional framework (locus of causality, stability,
controllability) to discern patterns of attributions.   In
addition, Yin (1989) specified three lesser modes of
analysis: embedded-unit analysis, repeated observation,
and case survey.   This study included embedded-unit
analysis as described, as well as repeated observation.
The repeated observations served to provide not only more
complete data within a single setting, but also as a cross-
sectional method of data collection--that is, at a second
site as one level of embedded analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Internal Validity

Internal validity is the degree to which the
conclusions presented follow logically from the data
(Merriam, 1988).   "Establishing validity necessitates
demonstration that the propositions generated, refined, or
tested match the causal conditions that obtain in human
life" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 219).

Merriam (1988) argued that "one of the assumptions
underlying qualitative research is that reality is
holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing" (p. 167).
Internal validity may be affected by many problems,

including history, maturation, and mortality of subjects, as well as selection and regression. However, the detailed descriptive methods commonly used in qualitative research provide "the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense'" (Firestone, 1987, p. 19). In fact, because of the data collection and analysis techniques used in qualitative research, internal validity is usually quite strong (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1988).

One way to ensure that research conclusions are valid is to use triangulation. Triangulation, the use of two or more methods of data collection, provides additional confidence in study findings (Cohen & Manion, 1980). In this study, several data collection techniques were used: observation, interview, and photography. Cohen and Manion (1980) asserted that "multiple methods are suitable where a *controversial aspect of education* needs to be evaluated more fully" (p. 262). The use of alternative programs and the motivations of at-risk youth are certainly controversial.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated,

It is only reasonable to assert that the investigator's judgment can be relied upon to the extent that he or she interacts with the phenomenon over time so that its etiology, including its history and its present context, can be fully understood and appreciated. (p. 102)

The use of repeated observation and interviews over a period of several months in this study provided the

researcher with a strong basis for the conclusions presented in Chapters IV and V.

External Validity

External validity is the ability to generalize to other situations from the results of a study (Merriam, 1988). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) argued that, because of the nature of qualitative study, it is inappropriate to suggest that a study's results are generalizable to another situation. Instead, "external validity depends on the identification and description of those characteristics of phenomena salient for comparison with other, similar types. . . . [after which] results may be translated for applicability across sites and disciplines" (p. 229). In other words, with thorough description of the context of the study, the reader is best able to discern whether the results are applicable to other situations.

The researcher made every effort to provide as detailed a description as possible in each of the four cases and final conclusions presented in this study. Such description should allow the reader to determine whether the conclusions presented apply to contexts of interest to the reader.

Reliability

Reliability is generally held to be the extent to which a study's findings can be replicated (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1988). This interpretation,

however, presumes "that there is a single reality which if studied repeatedly will give the same results" (Merriam, 1988, p. 170).

Reliability can be considered somewhat differently in qualitative research. "In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 44). Again, accurate recording of techniques and triangulation provide the reader the necessary documentation to determine the "fit" between the data and conclusions in a study. "A good guideline for doing case studies is therefore to conduct the research so that an auditor could repeat the procedures and arrive at the same results" (Yin, 1989, p. 45).

Investigator Bias

Potential biases are a critical issue in qualitative research. Awareness of those biases is, for the reader, one of the best tools for providing perspective into the study's reported results. Documentation of techniques and careful recording of field notes, including observer comments, helps guard against the introduction of subjectively influenced data into researcher conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several techniques to "provide a system of checks and balances [against researcher bias]" (p. 108). They are (a) member checks (rechecking data and interpretations with original data sources), (b) debriefings by peers (reviewing procedures and findings with professional peers), (c) triangulation (cross-checking through the use of multiple methods of data collection), (d) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (e) use of reflexive journals, and (f) use of the independent audit (examination of the researcher's processes and conclusions by an external auditor). All of the above methods will be used in the course of this study.

The greatest potential bias to this study is the relationship that the investigator developed with each of the four students. In each case, the researcher became an adult confident and mentor to the student. This allowed the researcher to see through the students' eyes the perceptions of being at risk. The researcher employed rigorous interview recording and transcribing practices as well as journal entries in an attempt to minimize subjectively biased recall of the interviews during data analysis.

Ethical Issues

The ethics of research practice are of concern in any study, but particularly so in case study research. The researcher needs to be aware of these issues and devise

safeguards that will help ensure that the rights of subjects are not violated.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggested four guidelines to protect against violating ethical concerns. They are

1. Protect subjects' identities.

2. Treat subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in the research.

3. Abide by any agreements you make in negotiating permission to do your study.

4. Tell the truth when you write up and report your findings.

The researcher made every attempt to adhere to these guidelines in conducting this study. Subjects were informed that they would remain anonymous in all study results.

CHAPTER IV
AT-RISK STUDENTS IN TWO MIDDLE SCHOOLS:
AFFECTIVE AND ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS IN
AN ALTERNATIVE-CLASSROOM SETTING

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the attributions of at-risk students who have been tracked into an alternative program at the middle-school level and identify the implications for school organization. Four students were observed and interviewed between February and November of 1991. Interviews with faculty and staff added to the contextual picture of the school program and at-risk tracking.

In this study, the perceptions of four at-risk students in two middle schools were compared and contrasted using an embedded-unit, single-case design. Weiner's theory of achievement motivation and emotion, utilizing the dimensions of locus of causality, controllability, and stability (1979, 1980, 1985), as well as the literature on tracking, at-risk, and attribution literature in general were used as a framework for this study.

The following research questions, grounded within the literature on at-risk, dropouts, tracking, and attribution theory, guided data collection in this study:

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1. Considering Weiner's three dimensions of locus of causality, controllability, and stability, does attribution theory provide a framework for explaining and predicting the behaviors of at-risk students?

2. Do students in at-risk programs demonstrate a propensity to attribute causality of negative events externally?

3. Do students in at-risk programs view themselves as in control of the events that affect their lives?

4. Do at-risk students perceive of causal events as stable or unstable?

The Settings: Two Middle Schools

This chapter contains seven sections. The first section is an overview of the two middle-school settings used in this study. The second section is a profile of the inner-city middle school, including a description of the campus, the alternative program, a typical alternative class, and each of the two students. A similarly-detailed description of the rural middle-school's program is contained in the third section. The fourth and fifth sections contain narrative data on each school, including descriptions of the programs and student interviews. Comparisions across the four students are related in the sixth section. The two schools are compared and contrasted in the final section.

Data collection was conducted in two middle schools in the Pacific Northwest, Inner-City Middle School and Rural Middle School (all names in this study have been changed to protect the identity of the informants). Two programs were chosen in order to compare and contrast the experiences of at-risk students in very different school settings (see Lomotey & Swanson, 1989). Both of the schools in this study were designated as middle schools. However, the two schools differed widely in their size, scheduling, course offerings, instruction, and program goals. For all practical purposes, the rural middle school in this study closely resembled a junior high school. The inner-city school, however, more closely embraced the middle-school philosophy (see Alexander & George, 1981 for more on middle school philosophy and structure).

For example, the rural school followed a seven-period, seven-teacher schedule with no core classes or team teaching. The inner-city school, in contrast, included a three-period humanities core class (either self-contained or team-taught) along with a daily advisory class. The advisory classes emphasized study skills, peer relations, and academic guidance. Although Rural Middle was structured more like a junior high school, its small population (approximately 225 student and 9 full-time teachers) fostered a friendly atmosphere.

It is important to acknowledge the constraints that program structure imposes on special programs. The students in the inner-city alternative program spent at least three periods each day with the alternative program core teacher. At the rural school, however, the teacher's alternative class consisted of only one 45-minute period each day. Inner-city's students spent three times as much class time with their alternative teacher than Rural's students spent with theirs.

Each of the schools included a designated at-risk program. The programs' goals and methods were very different, however, as were their student populations. The inner-city program included students with histories of substance abuse, violence, and delinquent behavior, whereas the rural program specifically excluded students with such behaviors in an attempt to help more "motivated" students.

Two students were selected at each school from an at-risk class. Students were selected to participate through purposive sampling. Merriam (1988) defined purposive sampling (also called criterion-based sampling) as the process of selecting subjects or situations from which one can learn the most. Purposive sampling allows investigation of both variation and similarities within a sample population. At both schools, students were chosen because the teachers believed those students would benefit from individual attention. In addition, students exhibited

behaviors which the teachers believed to be similar to that of other students in the programs.

Students were asked whether they would be interested in participating in a study about middle school students' feelings about school. Using repeated observations, interviews, and photographic exercises during the period of time from February through June of 1991, case study data were compiled on each of the four participants. Follow-up interviews were conducted in the fall of the 1991-92 academic year in order to assess the students' transitions between at-risk and regular programs.

Initially, meetings with the principals of each of the two schools provided details on the two programs. The at-risk morning class at Inner-City Middle was a three period core class of language arts, social studies, and reading. The alternative program coordinator supplied information on potential subjects. Several observations of the at-risk class were conducted. The coordinator selected two eighth-grade students, Jaime and Michael, perceived to be typical at-risk students, for potential subjects.

At Rural Middle, the at-risk program was relatively new and composed of two language arts classes and two mathematics classes. Students were identified as at risk by virtue of their failing grades. Students who were considered by the principal to be severe behavior problems were not placed in the program. Observations were

conducted in two language arts classes on several occasions. The teacher selected two seventh-grade students, Elizabeth and Jordan, perceived to be typical at-risk students, for potential subjects. All four students were amenable to a series of formal and informal interviews to be conducted over the period of the study.

The majority of interview data was collected during the spring of the 1990-91 academic year. Students were also contacted throughout the summer and approximately 6 weeks and 10 weeks into the 1991-92 school year. Both Elizabeth and Jordan entered the eighth grade, remaining at Rural Middle. Michael and Jaime started City High School as freshman.

<div align="center">Profile of an Inner-city School</div>

The following section is a profile of Inner-City Middle School. A description of the campus and the alternative program are contained within this section. In addition, a typical day in the alternative class is detailed. Two students, Jaime and Michael, were selected from Inner-City's alternative program to participate in this study. Demographic data on these students are also contained in this section.

The Campus

Inner-City Middle School has a sixth through eighth grade population of approximately 575 students. Located in a large, metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest, Inner-

City's student body is comprised of approximately 35%
black, 60% white, and 5% Asian and Hispanic students.

The campus of Inner-City Middle is situated in an
older, predominately residential neighborhood. Well-kept
landscaping surrounds a two-story brick school building.
The building itself is over 50 years old, yet appears
sturdy and cheery. The halls are brightly lit and
spacious. The main office for attendance and
administration is large and welcoming. Wall posters,
activity announcements, and awards decorate the walls.

Four wide stairwells provide access to the second
floor of the building. Room numbers, offices, and
bathrooms are clearly marked with bright painted lettering.
Graffiti and litter are minimal. The large classrooms have
high ceilings, numerous windows, and several large chalk
boards. Traditional classroom desks and chairs form rows.
The heating system is insufficient in many of the
classrooms; during the winter most students wear layers of
clothing in order to adjust to temperature changes in the
building throughout the day.

The atmosphere throughout much of Inner-City Middle is
that of organized chaos. Some students dash from class to
class like bundles of energy. Others amble along,
unconcerned at the sounding of the tardy bell. Students
are friendly to and curious about visitors.

The Alternative Program

Housed within the school was a community-linked alternative program designed to assist students at risk of school failure. The program's mission statement read, in part, that the program was "designed to offer everyone a chance to experience joy, fun, gratitude, tenderness, love, accomplishment and victory." The program was in its fourth year in the 1990-91 school year when this study began. The program targeted students with low self-esteem, failing academic performance, and poor attendance. Students in the program often had histories of negative behaviors, which may include fighting, vandalism, theft, drug or alcohol abuse, physical or emotional battering, and sexual activity.

Students were referred for the program by teachers, administrators, counselors, or parents, and then evaluated by the program coordinator. The principal espoused the goal of tapping into the unrecognized potential of at-risk students. He stated that the alternative program was designed to provide at-risk students with improved academic and social skills in order to be able to succeed in other settings.

According to the principal and assistant principal, the program instructors utilized a variety of modified instructional techniques, recognizing the diverse learning styles of students. The principal considered chemical

abuse and gang involvement to be the two main obstacles to success for these students. There were approximately 80 students, grades 6 through 8, enrolled in the alternative program in the 1990-91 school year. The students in the program represented a variety of backgrounds. Many of the students' families were receiving public assistance. Students often left home without eating, so breakfast was provided in the morning core class.

The alternative program consisted of a small sixth-grade core, and two mixed seventh- and eighth-grade cores. In the morning core class observed in this study, about two-thirds of the students were male, and about one-half the class was white. There were 24 students assigned to the class; attendance rarely exceeded 18 students on any given day. Students frequently arrived late for one reason or another, and attendance varied from student to student. The same teacher was responsible for all three subjects.

The teacher of the seventh- and eighth-grade core classes, Mrs. Samples, was on a temporary, 1-year contract. The regular teacher was on sabbatical during the 1990-91 school year. At the end of the school year, the teacher on leave decided not to return.

Because of decreased funding, the program structure was revised for the 1991-92 school year. The program was revised into a seventh- and eighth-grade core in which the students will be mainstreamed into regular classes mid-

year. To maintain contact with the students and assess their transition, each student is assigned to one period of study skills with the alternative-program teacher. At mid-year, targeted sixth graders become a core class for the remainder of the school year. The sixth-grade teacher from the 1990-91 academic year becomes the master teacher for the program.

Mr. Warren served as classroom aide in the at-risk program when this study began. The 1990-91 school year was his first with the program also. His primary duties included assisting the classroom teacher with supervision and preparation of instructional materials. Mr. Warren renewed his contract and planned to return as classroom aide for the 1991-92 school year. However, Mrs. Ferguson, the program coordinator, decided not to rehire Mr. Warren as aide for the alternative program. She believed he was too aggressive and controlling to be of benefit to the students.

Mrs. Ferguson maintained an office located in the rear of the classroom. She was in the classroom approximately 30% of the time. The remainder of the school day (and beyond) she worked as an outreach contact to parents and community, served as a liaison between the school and police/court system for some students, organized fund raisers and field trips, and coordinated transition for at-risk students between elementary, middle, and high school.

The principal and the assistant principal at Inner-City Middle School were extremely committed to the success of the alternative program. For example, the principal struggled to provide continued funding for the program. He also encouraged the program coordinator in her endeavors to foster community support for the program. Both the principal and assistant principal considered the at-risk population to be much larger than what the school could serve.

Each praised the program coordinator as being something of a patron saint of the at risk. Mrs. Ferguson was, in their estimation, tough but loving, and willing to commit an abundance of time and energy to the at-risk students. Although the principal and assistant principal maintained an active interest in the program, they were both willing to defer to Mrs. Ferguson on most issues involving the students, with the exception of severe discipline problems.

Mrs. Ferguson appeared, on first meeting, to be a bundle of energy. She was interested in talking about "her kids" and their needs, but was very protective of them. In her opinion, one of the more common problems the students suffered from was the lack of a consistent adult role model. She wanted to choose two students for the study whom she believed could benefit from one-to-one time with an adult.

Mrs. Ferguson, in addition to coordinating the program at Inner-City, also served as co-director of the district summer program designed to involve students in the school system. Weekly summer camps conducted at various school sites served students from kindergarten through eighth grade. The other director, Mr. Ford, worked for the parks and recreation department and collaborated with Mrs. Ferguson throughout the year to provide after-school activities for the at-risk students.

A Typical Core Class in the Alternative Classroom

The morning core class at Inner-City included reading, language arts, and social studies. Class began each morning at 8:30 a.m. At the beginning of the school year, breakfast was scheduled for approximately 15 minutes prior to the 8:30 bell. By mid-year, however, students were provided with breakfast during the first part of class. Breakfast generally consisted of juice or milk, an apple or orange, and a sweet pastry, roll, muffin, or pancakes.

The atmosphere of the alternative class seemed contrary to that of the rest of the building. Students were either boisterous and out of control or sullen and defensive. On any given day, the mood of the students was unpredictable.

As the bell rang, some students were already in their seats. Others wandered to their desks while a few last stragglers came through the door. About five students

consistently arrived at school late, usually during the first two class periods. First period reading class started with the admonition from Mrs. Samples or Mr. Warren to "quiet down," after which the announcements were read. For the next 40 minutes or so, students were required to read silently. Mrs. Samples recorded daily how much each student had read.

Often, students sat quietly or rested their heads on their desks during the reading period. However, after approximately 15 or 20 minutes, many students were restless and started to whisper among themselves. At this point, Mr. Warren and Mrs. Samples, who sat at desks on opposite sides of the room, started warning the students who were talking. "How many pages have you read, John? I don't think you've been getting much done lately." "I don't appreciate your talking and disrupting the others who are trying to read." Or, "I hope I'm not going to have to have you in here for lunch." Generally, the warnings were ineffectual. Students ceased talking momentarily, then resumed with efforts to be less conspicuous.

Some days Mr. Warren or Mrs. Samples seemed to have a lower tolerance for the persistent talking and sent students to the back office for a little "talk." Such talks usually involved berating the student for a bad attitude and poor work habits. Sometimes the student listened silently, appearing bored; other times the student

might lash out defensively. "I wasn't the only one talking. Why do you always pick on me?" If the student was lectured by both Mrs. Samples and Mr. Warren, the other students had free reign to talk and move about.

At the end of the period, students were allowed a 5-minute break. Students who had annoyed either adult might be forced to sit in the room without a break. Language arts was usually taught during second period and social studies would be taught third period, although occasionally the two classes would be reversed.

Language arts class focused primarily on spelling and grammar. Mrs. Samples began the class by giving directions for the daily activity, sometimes introducing or reviewing material. On spelling day, the students spent most of the period copying spelling words from a list, looking up definitions in the dictionary, and copying those definitions. Spelling lists generally included about thirty words. As with silent reading, students often became bored part way through the assignment or rushed to complete it, and then began talking or acting out. On other days, students might work on worksheets to learn rules of grammar. Occasionally, they worked on poetry or literature. Mrs. Samples and Mr. Warren regularly worked at their desks, but they sometimes walked around monitored student work. Students were frequently off task. Often, the class was admonished as a whole. "There's too much

talking going on. Don't make me take your break away."
Or, "I'm really tired of this behavior. I will not
tolerate it much longer." Sometimes, individuals were
reprimanded.

Students attended a 20-minute advisor/advisee class
between second and third period. For third period, the
core class returned to Mrs. Samples class for social
studies. Social studies was conducted in much the same way
as language arts. Students read books, answered written
questions, or watched films. The students' behavior was
much the same as in the other two periods. Students
appeared bored, were off task, and looked for other ways to
entertain themselves. Mrs. Samples was often frustrated
with the students' behavior and seemed unable to control
the classroom. If there was a negative event (such as a
fight) early in the day, the classroom atmosphere became
tense and increasingly negative as the day progressed.

Jaime

Jaime was a 13.6 year-old eighth grader when this
study began. She appears Caucasian, but is also half
Japanese-Hawaiian. She was physically mature and sexually
active. At 5' 9" tall, she more closely resembled a young
woman of 16 to 18 than a middle-school student.

All information about Jaime must be considered with
the caveat that Jaime compulsively exaggerated. For
example, she described City High School as having over

1,000 new transfer students in the 1991-92 school year when the total school population was less than 1,000. In another instance, she reported that a friend's dog was losing weight because he was very old--nearly 50. When questioned, "You mean in dog years?" She replied, "No, in people years!" Most of the details related here have been corroborated with school staff or her family when possible; however, there are some instances of conflicting data. In these cases, as accurate an account has been reconstructed as was possible.

Jaime's mother was 15 years old when Jaime was born. Jaime's mother allowed her parents (Jaime's grandparents) to adopt Jaime and raise her as their own. She was raised believing that her mother and her aunts were older sisters. Jaime's biological father was killed in a motorcycle accident when Jaime was 2 years of age.

At age 10, Jaime's grandmother became terminally ill from diabetes. During the final stages of the illness, Jaime was told that her "mom" was really her grandmother. Jaime met her biological mother again when the mother returned to town for the grandmother's funeral.

At this point, Jaime became, from her own account, uncontrollable. Her mother left town again after her grandmother's funeral. Her grandfather (actually her step-grandfather), whom she calls her dad, sent her to Florida to live with one of her aunts for most of the year. There

she made friends with a group of kids that were actively involved with drugs and sex. She "learned a lot on the street," and became involved with the police for various offenses ranging from fighting to shoplifting.

After nearly a year, her grandfather provided for Jaime to come home. In the spring of 1991, her mother moved back to the area. Her mother has four other children, three of whom live with her. Jaime is the oldest child. The youngest is less than two years old. Jaime alternately lived with her grandfather, her mother, and her aunts during the course of this study. At times, her various boyfriends lived with her. Jaime was living with her grandfather in a small, one-bedroom house about one-half mile from Inner-City Middle and three miles from City High School at the end of data collection for this study.

Mrs. Samples and Mrs. Ferguson both described Jaime as intelligent and creative. Mrs. Ferguson said, "She has the ability to be a real scholar." Her attendance was one of the major handicaps to her success in school. The absenteeism was related to many different issues; Jaime had a history of fighting, and she had been picked up by the police several times. She was on probation throughout the spring of the 1990-91 school year. Jaime reported using alcohol and may have used other drugs as well.

Jaime had six different boyfriends over the course of the study. All were between 17 and 22 years of age. She

reported being sexually active with each of them. Jaime has periodically received medical treatment for various sexually transmitted diseases.

Jaime began the 1991-92 school year approximately three months pregnant. She said she was undecided whether to keep the child or give it up for adoption. She was enrolled in regular classes and a special teen-parenting class at City High School.

Approximately five weeks into the school year, Jaime had already missed portions of 17 days of school--"I just didn't feel like going"--and had dropped two of her six classes. Because of her numerous absences, she was failing all of her classes and was unlikely to earn any credits for the fall 1991 school term. By early October, she was only attending school from approximately 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.. Jaime was observed and interviewed for over 35 hours between March and October of 1991.

Michael

Michael was a 13.7 year-old eighth grader at the beginning of this study. He is black, and was fairly advanced physically for his age. Michael lived with his mother and aunt in the inner city about one mile away from Inner-City Middle during the course of this study. He was an only child. His biological father and mother were never married. He visited his father approximately once every other month. His mother was involved with another man whom

Michael considered to be his father, but who passed away when Michael was nine years old.

Michael was athletic and interested in all types of sports. He used most of his leisure time to play basketball or football. He also enjoyed cooking and watching television.

Michael was a bright young man with an impressive vocabulary and spontaneous sense of humor. However, he was quick to be defensive and often spoke out at inappropriate times. His speaking and acting out in class have caused him problems for the past several school years. However, Michael generally got along well with his teachers and peers. He was pleasant and friendly for the most part. Because of his outbursts, however, he was sent out of class and disciplined enough times to warrant his placement in the at-risk program.

According to Mrs. Ferguson, Michael was academically successful in the at-risk program at Inner-City Middle, but did not make much progress at modifying his behavior. Michael also participated as a junior counselor in Mrs. Ferguson's summer program. He performed well as a counselor for the younger groups of children, but he often misbehaved when involved with children closer to his own age. Subsequently, Mrs. Ferguson stopped using him as a counselor for the latter part of the summer.

In the 1991-92 school year at City High School,
Michael was enrolled in regular classes for the entire
school day. He was a member of the ninth-grade football
squad. By the sixth week of school, his attendance had
been good, but his grades were marginal in most of his
classes. His teachers reported that approximately five
weeks into the fall term, Michael began failing to complete
assignments and was frequently tardy to class. Michael was
suspended the seventh week of school in the 1991-92 school
year after a physical confrontation with the varsity
football coach. Michael was observed and interviewed for
over 35 hours between March and October of 1991.

Profile of a Rural School

The following section contains a profile of Rural
Middle School. A description of the campus and the
alternative program are contained within this section. In
addition, a typical day in the alternative class is
detailed. Two students, Elizabeth and Jordan, were
selected from Rural Middle's alternative program to
participate in this study. Demographic data on these
students are also contained in this section.

The Campus

Rural Middle is located in the Pacific Northwest.
About 15 miles removed from the nearest sizeable city and
30 miles from a large metropolitan area, Rural Middle's
community is primarily supported by an agricultural and

industrial economy. The student population at Rural Middle School during the 1990-91 school year consisted of approximately 225 seventh and eighth graders, 99% of whom were white.

A long, winding road off the interstate freeway leads to the city in which Rural Middle is located. The town's main shops are established on either side of this same street. Rural's campus is one of the first buildings on the edge of town. To one side of the school is a recreational field; behind the school is one of the district's elementary schools.

The school is built around a commons area in a slightly irregular rectangular shape. Classrooms in each leg of the building may be entered from either side. The building is approximately 18 years old and is under renovation to add storage and locker space. Classrooms are constructed in pairs; sliding walls separate them and can be opened to form one large room. This allows teachers to open the walls and lead group activities between classes.

The main office area is rather small, but students are greeted by a friendly secretary and seem to feel comfortable stopping in to ask for help. The cafeteria bustles at lunch time as students wait for hot lunches or sit down to eat a bag lunch.

Classrooms are well lit and spacious. Desks and chairs are sometimes arranged in rows, sometimes arranged

randomly for discussion or group activities. Floors are carpeted to help absorb noise. Walls are covered with posters and student work. Students are mostly respectful and friendly, willing to give directions or answer questions. There is an air of small-town closeness throughout the school.

The Alternative Program

The at-risk program was comprised of two math classes in effect for the entire 1990-91 school year, and two language arts classes which began just after semester change in late February. Students were assigned to the classes on the basis of failing grades but were not placed in the program if they were considered by the principal to be a severe discipline problem. In the 1991-92 school year, declining funding allowed for only one class each of mathematics and language arts. Students were assigned to the program on the basis of percentile scoring on the statewide standardized achievement test administered the previous year.

The principal, Mr. Durnan, had concurrently served as principal of one of the two feeder elementary schools and the middle school until the 1990-91 school year. Consequently, he was well acquainted with half of the students as they entered the middle school. He stated that he was confident he knew which students were "problems"

within a week of the beginning of the school year, even with new students.

The at-risk math teacher was identified by the principal as a teacher who had "had some problems" in the past. In fact, Mr. Durnan considered the math teacher his "personal project," in need of mentoring to better his teaching skills. He was described by Mr. Durnan as a teacher who was "only here to collect a paycheck." The math teacher was reluctant to have anyone observe or interview in his class. He was reassigned to the nearby elementary school for the 1991-92 school year.

Mrs. Willowes, the language arts teacher, was a substitute teacher for several years after completing her teacher training. The 1990-91 school year marked her first contract position. She was hired as a five-sevenths time teacher. In February, she was offered the position of at-risk language arts instructor for two periods in the afternoon. Because the program was not fully funded, Mrs. Willowes was offered aide pay to teach the at-risk classes.

Mrs. Willowes was very congenial. Mr. Durnan had told her only that some students in her class would be involved in a study. Mrs. Willowes was concerned about improving her teaching techniques; she seemed to genuinely care about the students and how she could best help them. She was eager to have some of her students participate in the study so they could receive extra individual attention.

The sixth-period at-risk language arts class contained eight seventh- and eighth-grade students: five white females (one eighth grade, four seventh grade) and three white males (all seventh grade). The seventh-period at-risk class was comprised of eight white males, five seventh graders and three eighth graders.

A Typical Class Period in the At-Risk Language Arts Class

Both the sixth- and seventh-period language arts class usually progressed similarly on any given day. Mrs. Willowes greeted students by name as they entered class. "Billy--I heard about your math test. Congratulations!" "Hi Suzy. How'd the game turn out?" Or, "Ben! You got your hair cut! It looks great!" Mrs. Willowes was particularly attentive to any student who looked dejected, and often took a few minutes to confer with the student.

The students retrieved their work folders from a bin on one side of the room, then took their seats before the bell rang. Class usually began with a few words of encouragement from Mrs. Willowes, for example, "I'm really pleased with how well you all worked on your projects yesterday. We'll be continuing those today." After this brief introduction, the class read silently for the first 10 minutes of class. Mrs. Willowes worked individually with a student who had a second-grade reading ability. Students read quietly and generally stayed on task. After reading, students took about five minutes to write in a

daily journal. Mrs. Willowes walked around to make sure that everyone was working.

Next, Mrs. Willowes introduced the day's activities. She would generally include at least two different activities during the class period so that students would not become bored. Activities included memorizing prepositions, writing poems and stories, learning grammar, drilling and testing spelling skills, reading literature, and reviewing study skills.

Students sometimes groaned about unfavored activities, but Mrs. Willowes made an effort to make the learning less painful. For example, she challenged each of her two classes to learn all of the 50 most common prepositions, promising an ice cream party to each class if everyone could memorize the prepositions. The students helped each other to learn them, and both classes qualified for the party. She rewarded students with praise and recognition for good work; she taught the students to appreciate help and good work done by others. Mrs. Willowes took class time to discuss issues such as self-esteem and respect for others.

When students were off task, a few calm words from Mrs. Willowes generally prompted them to get back to work. "Jenny, you've just got a few minutes left to finish up." Mrs. Willowes was never abrupt or angry when chiding a student. Students in Mrs. Willowes' class reported feeling

more successful and appreciated while in her classroom. The atmosphere in her class was almost always pleasant and secure.

<u>Elizabeth</u>

Elizabeth posed a striking contrast to Jaime. Elizabeth was a 12.7 year-old seventh grader at the beginning of this study. She was generally quiet and unassuming, and she had had few conflicts with her peers or school personnel. She was identified as at-risk by virtue of her failing grades. Her attendance was somewhat sporadic because of illness, although many of her illnesses during the time of this study seemed exaggerated. For example, Elizabeth missed nearly a week of school after deciding she had bronchitis. She never went to the doctor, but a friend had been diagnosed as having bronchitis and Elizabeth reported many of the same symptoms. So she stayed home because she had heard that it took at least a week to get over bronchitis.

Elizabeth was the youngest of four children. Her parents owned and ran a small grocery store and gun shop. Her oldest brother was in his early 20s and worked for their parents. Her sister was 20 years old and unmarried with three children; she dropped out of school at the age of 14. Her other brother was 16 and lived at home with Elizabeth and her parents. He attended the nearby high

school. He and Elizabeth fought constantly because he was "mean to her."

Elizabeth loved animals and collected strays. She had several dogs, a cat with kittens, and squirrels. She talked about her animals as if they were part of her family. Elizabeth was also very interested in fashion; she spent a great deal of time reading through magazines and trying out new clothing, hair, and make-up styles.

Elizabeth did not qualify to be in the at-risk language arts program at Rural Middle School in the 1991-92 school year. The principal enrolled only students who were below the 30th percentile on a standardized assessment test, despite Mrs. Willowes' objections.

Elizabeth returned from her summer vacation to begin the 1991-92 school year approximately 30 pounds lighter and with blond hair. She seemed to exude a new sense of self-confidence and enthusiasm. Elizabeth was not enrolled in the at-risk program for her eighth-grade year. After nine weeks of school, she was maintaining passing grades in six of her seven courses. Elizabeth was described by her teachers as having a "much improved" attitude from the previous year. However, she was also described as having a short attention span and difficulty focusing on her work. She was more self-confident and outgoing. Several of her teachers voiced concern that Elizabeth was dressing inappropriately in an attempt to gain attention. Elizabeth

was observed and interviewed for over 30 hours between March and October of 1991.

<u>Jordan</u>

At the beginning of this study, Jordan was a 13.3 year-old seventh grader who was extremely physically immature. At 4' 8" in height, he was one of the smallest seventh-grade boys. Jordan was outgoing and appeared self-confident, despite his recent record of failing grades.

Jordan lived with his mother and stepfather and younger sister. His father lived about 200 miles away, and Jordan generally visited him for several weeks during summer vacation. His stepfather had a son and a daughter who lived with their mother during the 1990-91 school year, but spent most weekends at Jordan's house. Jordan's stepbrother and stepsister moved in with Jordan's family during the summer. Jordan considered his stepbrother and stepsister to be among his best friends until they moved in with him. In fact, he described himself as feeling closer to them than to his real sister. Jordan and his stepbrother began having difficulties getting along after his stepbrother moved in and started attending the local high school. Jordan's parents were divorced when he was approximately three years of age, and he has had contact with his biological father infrequently since that time. His mother remarried when he was nine years old and he said he liked his stepfather a great deal.

Jordan was active in the school chorus; he was a frequent soloist in school concerts. Jordan also enjoyed shop and home economics. He made wood projects for his home and sewed some of his own clothes. Jordan loved sports, but he was often at a disadvantage because of his small size. He excelled in physical education class because of his enthusiasm and energy.

Jordan began the 1991-92 school year in regular classes. Jordan reported doing fine in all his classes, but admitted he was not completing all his work or studying enough for tests. Nine weeks into the school year (the end of the first quarter), he was passing all of his seven classes. Jordan was observed and interviewed for over 30 hours between March and October of 1991.

Inner-City Middle School

Two students, Jaime and Michael, were observed and interviewed within Inner-City's at-risk program; data from those observations and interviews are contained in this section. Data on the program and staff are also contained in this section.

The Students

Jaime. Jaime was something of an enigma. Because of her complex family life, she developed her own set of values for dealing with everyday life. She was a survivor, but her actions did not always mesh with mainstream social values, particularly those endorsed by the school system.

Jaime maintained a passing grade average in the eighth grade despite behavior and attendance problems. In the fall of the 1990-91 school year, she earned a 2.70 grade point average with 16 full-day absences (reported full-day absences are in addition to tardies and partial-day absences) and 25 office referrals. In the spring of 1991, she earned a 2.75 grade point average with six full-day absences and 10 office referrals. She improved her attendance and behavior after being placed on juvenile-court probation.

> Jaime: [My dad] didn't like it when I didn't come to school because he knew I'd be skipping and he'd always have the cops calling, or picking me up. 'Cause I'd have to go to JDH [juvenile detention]. Even if I have a doctor's note that I'm not supposed to be in school, or if I get suspended, they'll stick me in. And then after 10 o'clock on a week night I got to be in the house, or after 12 o'clock on the weekend. And I'm not allowed to get in no more fights. Which I would've loved to yesterday. I went to the mall, and my old best friend, she's mad at me because I wrote-- they've got chalkboards down there, you know--I wrote we weren't best friends and she got mad and wrote that I had VD. I got mad and seen her. And I just wanted to yell at her, but I couldn't 'cause a cop was standing right there.

City High School's attendance policy required that students have not more than 16 absences in any given class in order to receive semester credit for that class. By the end of October of her freshman year, Jaime had dropped two of her classes. In her remaining four classes, literature, mathematics, social studies, and teen parenting, she had exceeded the absence limit. At the end of the first quarter, she was failing everything except mathematics, in

which she earned a "no grade" because of her absences.
Very likely, she would not earn any credits for the fall
semester of her freshman year.

Jaime experienced some academic success at school.
However, that success was infrequent because of her poor
attendance. Her response to academic failure was apparent
indifference. She reported that she <u>could</u> (ability)
succeed, but <u>chose</u> (effort) not to. In the spring of
eighth grade, she described her recently improved grades:

<u>Jaime</u>: I'm finally getting good grades.

<u>Researcher</u>: So what do you think makes the difference
now that your grades are better?

<u>Jaime</u>: I'm coming to school. Before I was sick and
skipped school.

She stated that middle school was harder than elementary
school, but her failures were only because she had missed
so much school.

<u>Researcher</u>: What's the difference between elementary
and middle school?

<u>Jaime</u>: Middle school's harder. . . . Classes.
Teachers. I'd never had an "F" in my life 'til I came
here. Here, the only reason I got F's is because I
never come.

<u>Researcher</u>: But you felt like you <u>could</u> do the work,
but just didn't want to?

<u>Jaime</u>: Yea.

Jaime tried to engage in what she believed to be adult
behaviors. She was independent; she roamed around the
downtown streets at night time, ate and slept whenever she

wanted, came and went as she pleased, and slept with
whomever she liked.

> Jaime: [My boyfriend] got mad at me because my
> sisters and my mother told me that I wasn't able to
> see him unless we had an adult with us.

> Researcher: So you won't mess around?

> Jaime: Basically. What they put on me is that I'm
> not able to see him at all unless we're in a public
> restaurant or a public movie theater or out in the
> public. And we've got to have an adult--not one of my
> friends that are over 18, not one of his friends that
> are over 18, but his parents or my parents or somebody
> in my family that's over 18. And it's like, we're
> never going to be together.

> Researcher: But you can go out unsupervised with your
> friends, is that right?

> Jaime: Uh-huh. . . . That's what I told my brother-
> in-law. I said, there's nothing keeping me from
> seeing him, 'cause tomorrow . . . I'm going to tell my
> sister I'm going to my friend's house and I'm going to
> go see him. They can't stop me. They won't find out.
> And if they do, it's their own fault.

The following week Jaime reported that her family was
letting her see the boyfriend anytime she wanted because,
"they can't stop me anyhow."

In many ways she was still very childlike. She sought
attention in various ways. She attempted to shock when
recounting stories:

> [My dad] died when I was two. . . . You know how when
> they take, inject something in you when you're dead so
> you don't swell up? They didn't do that to him, he
> went like six sizes bigger than he normally was. His
> face was all puffed out. It was gross.

She reported attempting suicide on several occasions.
She planned on jumping from a bridge at least two separate
times, but was stopped by friends or relatives. She said

she knew she had "a lot to live for," but sometimes things just made her too sad.

Events that could cause her to be viewed negatively were rarely reported by her as under her control. For example, when she attended school "hung over" on several occasions, it was always because someone had "spiked" her nonalcoholic drinks without her knowledge. Jaime did not want to accept responsibility for negative outcomes. She often reacted violently when she believed she was being blamed for something. She described an afternoon at the mall with a friend and the friend's puppy:

> [We were sitting down] and the puppy jumped off my lap
> . . . and it's jaw went to the side, like it broke
> it's jaw, you know, and this old lady, she was sitting
> there, she jumped up, she goes, "You broke it's jaw,
> you dummy!" To me. I don't know. I just lost my
> temper and I went off on her. I said, "You better
> shut up you old bag. I'm going to hit you."

Jaime constantly acted out against her family when away from the school grounds: promiscuous behavior, fighting, drinking, shoplifting, staying out all night, or other types of rule breaking. Occasionally she brought her aggression into the school; she reportedly made a written death threat against another student. In the classroom, she was generally passive and disinterested. She reported that school was boring for her.

Jaime did not complete the photo-elicitation project. She reported that her camera had been stolen from her on the street by her ex-boyfriend. She said that her dad was

going to buy her a new camera later that week when he got paid. Mr. Matthews did buy Jaime a new camera and she brought it with her to school the following Friday. Jaime was asked again to complete the project, but the camera somehow disappeared again and Jaime said she had no way of replacing it without her dad getting very angry with her.

Jaime did, however, bring in a set of photographs which she had taken on her own just prior to the time she was requested to complete the photo-elicitation project. The photographs were taken, therefore, without the directions to answer the question, "Who Am I?" Her photographs were all taken on the downtown streets. They included pictures of her boyfriend, a park where she had spent the night with her friends, and various street people. As she showed the pictures, she described the lives of street people she knew: sleeping under bridges, begging for money, and stealing food. She wanted to emphasize that they were not bad people. Most of the young ones had run away from home and had no where to go. Jaime said she empathized with them. She said that they had little or no control over their lives.

In June of 1991, Mr. Matthews reported that he "didn't know what to do" with Jaime. She sometimes stayed out all night with her friends. He said he thought he might have to "let her go her own way" for things to get better. At that time, she was going out with a 18-year-old man. She

said she knew he really loved her because he was willing to fight others for her.

> Jaime: He [the boyfriend] asked me to marry him.

> Researcher: Did he?

> Jaime: But I'm too young. But he told me, he goes, "Well, we could be engaged for a couple of years."

> Researcher: So do you like him a lot better than?

> Jaime: Yea. I can talk to him. He's different than all the other guys that I've gone with. I've said that once before, but this time it's true because, I mean, the first night I met him he got into one fight over me. The very first night I ever seen him he got into a fight with --- [old boyfriend]. And then last weekend he got into a fight over me again with some 31 year-old man.

Jaime seemed to deliberately attempt to become pregnant. Her use of birth control was infrequent, and one of her boyfriends reported that Jaime had often expressed a desire to have a baby. Before she became pregnant, Jaime said, "Everybody says I should have a baby 'cause I'm so good with kids." When asked if she thought she was old enough, she said, "Well, I'll probably wait a while. But everybody in my family was pregnant before they were 18." Jaime said that she could live with her grandpa and get extra Social Security money for her baby. The high school operated a day care. She planned on having the baby and continuing on with her life much the same as before. The teen-parenting teacher reported that Jaime showed little recognition of the seriousness of her situation. Her grandpa said that he would leave the decision about keeping

the baby up to her, but that he would not be responsible

for taking care of the child.

Jaime had taken care of her nieces and nephews, so she

said she knew something about the amount of care that an

infant would require. She thought that baby sitting the

kids was sometimes fun, sometimes boring. She described

her niece, who suffered from a rare bone disease:

> Jaime: She got both of her casts off. They put
> another brace on so she can walk. She's got a scar
> from here down from her surgery. She's going to be
> two. When she met my ex-boyfriend, first thing she
> said to him was F You.
>
> Researcher: Where'd she get that?
>
> Jaime: It's just 'cause her dad says it. She repeats
> everything. She's got a lot smarter because of her
> disability. You know that's what happens. . . Like
> blind people hearing better. She's so smart now.
>
> Researcher: That's great. Do they work with her a
> lot?
>
> Jaime: Not really. She has a doctor that comes to
> the house. Well, a nurse. Once every two weeks. And
> her doctor will talk to her about stuff. She knows
> these long words that I've never heard of. Like you'd
> look them up in a dictionary, and there they are!
> [Laughter] But she's really cute.

Sometimes she said that she knew it was probably best for

the baby to arrange for an adoption. Other times, she

talked about her future life with her baby: night-time

feedings, sleeping schedules, and baby sitting. Having a

child seemed to be a way to security; a constant in her

life of chaos. As her pregnancy progressed, she made plans

with the assumption that she would keep her baby, even

though she occasionally mentioned adoption. She acquired

baby clothes, a crib, a car seat, and other baby items.

Jaime projected a sense of sadness and resignation far

beyond her age. Jaime wrote the following poem in the

eighth grade:

> Even when there is war and many people die
> and nothing seems to get better
> Life goes on
> Even when your best friend moves away and never writes
> and you know you'll never find another one like her
> Life still goes on
> Even when you gain 10 pounds
> and you can't wear your favorite jeans
> and your vision is 20/40
> Life still goes on
> Even when you're no longer living
> Life still goes on . . .

Michael. Michael had the intelligence and humor to

succeed in the classroom, but sometimes his defensiveness

caused him problems. At Inner-City Middle School he was

frequently chastised for speaking out in the classroom at

inappropriate times. When asked what his main problem with

school had been in the past, Michael replied, "I mess with

the teachers too much." He explained why he was only

earning a D in Health class:

> Michael: Well, I get my work done. It's just 'cause
> I get sent out of class too much. Stupid reasons.
> Like clearing my throat. Or staring at the ceiling.
> She [the teacher] thinks I'm getting smart and she'll
> just send me out. Stuff like that.
>
> Researcher: Is any of it true, or is it all
> accidental stuff?
>
> Michael: Well, you know, clearing my throat, you
> know, I was clearing my throat. I wasn't trying to
> get no one's attention or nothing. I was just

clearing my throat. That's kind of stupid. That's
the kind of stuff that happens.

Researcher: Sometimes are you goofing off?

Michael: Sometimes I'm talking to somebody else.
When she gives me a warning I just stop and that's all
there is to it. But I haven't got kicked out lately;
it's just every Monday.

Researcher: Mondays are a bad day?

Michael: Um-huh [nods yes].

Michael maintained excellent attendance and passing

grades his eighth-grade year at Inner-City Middle. In the

fall of the 1990-91 academic year, he earned a 2.1 grade-

point average, with five full-day absences and 15 office

referrals. In the spring of 1991, he earned a 2.2 grade-

point average, with three full-day absences and 10 office

referrals. His office referrals were generally due to

speaking or acting out in class at inappropriate times.

Throughout the course of this study, whenever Michael

described his problems in school, he would explain that he

was improving his behavior; he understood why he was having

problems and was in the process of changing his behavior.

Michael: I can still bring them all up [his grades].

Researcher: So what are you going to do to try to
bring them up?

Michael: Just work hard and all, don't talk to
people, just get my work done.

Researcher: 'Cause you really don't have a problem as
far as your schoolwork, do you?

Michael: Not at all.

Researcher: It's just talking in class or whatever.

Michael: I've almost got that down. Just don't talk to the friends that I might get in trouble until, you know, it's a good time to talk, or if she doesn't mind a little whispering or something like that. And I get my work done and everything. Get that done first, you know, maybe I'll talk or just sit there or something.

After six weeks at City High School, he had excellent attendance but was not excelling academically. In fact, Michael was receiving low C's and D's in all his classes. He reported that he thought he had about a C average, but knew he "could do a lot better." He claimed that he could do better; he just needed to try harder. After nine weeks at City High, Michael's grades had dropped and he had received a two-day suspension because of a physical confrontation with a faculty member. Michael reported that he "had words" with the teacher, who then told him to report to the detention room. Michael wanted to go to his locker first, but the teacher blocked his way and again told him to report directly to the detention room. Michael said he then "moved the teacher out of [his] way."

Researcher: Does that mean you shoved him?

Michael: Well, yea.

Researcher: So what did you learn from this experience?

Michael: [Responds immediately] Never do it again.

Michael reported that he had earned "about a D average" on his first-quarter (nine weeks) grades at City High. When asked, "Did you fail any classes?" he responded, "Well, yea. Several of them." His counselor

reported that Michael had failed drafting and mathematics.
Michael met with his counselor at the beginning of the new
quarter and said he planned on improving his grades in the
second quarter:

> Michael: I've got to get my head into it. I'm doing
> better now--this quarter.
>
> Researcher: And so have you figured out what the
> problem was before, and how you're going to change it?
>
> Michael: Yea. I've got to hand in my work. Stay in
> my seat. Stay out of trouble.

Michael had made almost the exact same observation at the
end of eighth grade, but was still facing the same problems
in his ninth-grade year.

Michael experienced problems separating how to be
successful and how to deal with his frustrations in class;
he knew he had trouble with how he reacted to teachers.
When asked, at the end of his eighth-grade year, how he
could improve his performance at high school, he said:

> Michael: I'm just going to keep all my thoughts in
> until the last day of school.
>
> Researcher: You mean you're going to wait for four
> years?
>
> Michael: Each year?
>
> Researcher: Wait 'til the last day?
>
> Michael: Yea.
>
> Researcher: But don't you think that maybe by
> Christmas time you'll be ready to explode?
>
> Michael: Well, yea.

After failing most of his classes the first quarter at City
High, Michael said he knew he had to "get his grades up for
the card that counts in January." He was well aware that
his semester grades would be part of his permanent record,
and would be looked at when he applied for college. "I've
got to do what I got to do. Make the teacher happy. Then
go tomorrow and do it all over again."

Michael believed that he had the ability to succeed.
When asked if he had any problem with his schoolwork, he
said, "not at all." His primary problem was his inability
to conform to classroom behavior standards.

Michael said he would like to have an adult male
around to talk to--someone who would understand his
problems and allow him to talk things out. He lived with
his mother and his aunt, and said he sometimes needed a
male perspective:

> It kind of gets boring because all the people [I] have
> to talk to is women, and they don't understand. Girls
> talking to women they can understand, you know, but
> I'm a guy talking to women. They understand most of
> my problems in school, but not everything.

Some interesting details emerged during a discussion with
Michael regarding the photographs he took. Michael
returned his camera after two days, with only eight
pictures taken. When asked if he wanted to take any more
pictures, he decided to keep the camera a little longer.
Two days later he returned the camera with twelve pictures
taken and said he was done.

In discussing his photo project, Michael showed a picture of himself at the cemetery kneeling over the gravestone of the man he considered his dad. When asked what the significance of the photograph was, he said, "This one is to show that I have no man in my life to discipline me and to talk to me."

Michael was asked if the pictures represented the central part of what was important in his life: his interests and his family. He said yes. Michael was distracted and did not really want to talk about what the pictures meant. He said, "That's just it. My life. I don't know what they mean. That's just all there is."

Michael seemed to have a clear picture of what he wants to do, but not a realistic idea of how to achieve his goals. He wanted to attend college.

Researcher: What do you have to do to get to college?

Michael: Get good credits in high school. [Long pause] Be good and you'll do great.

Researcher: So doing great--what does that mean from day to day?

Michael: Discipline myself to study hard.

Researcher: Study. What else?

Michael: [Shrug] I don't know.

Michael did not have much family support for his future college plans. He reported that his mother did not think he'd make it to college " 'cause I act up in school." When

asked how that made him feel, he said, "Kind of hurt me, but you get used to it after a while."

At the end of his eighth-grade year Michael found out that he had been selected to be a junior counselor in Mrs. Ferguson's summer program. He said that although the job did not pay anything, he knew it was good experience and "looked good on a college application." Michael was anxious to start high school--to start over and get ready for college.

> Researcher: How [have you] changed or what [have you] learned about school [this year]?
>
> Michael: At the beginning I was doing pretty good, then I slacked off when. . . for most of the year. Then I started coming up and then I've just been staying at a steady level since then, you know?
>
> Researcher: So you think you're doing better than you were before, anyhow. So what do you think about high school? Do you feel positive about it?
>
> Michael: Yea, I'm ready to go!
>
> Researcher: Ready to go and get it over with?
>
> Michael: Yup. I want to go to college soon.

Michael planned on working several jobs in order to pay for college, as well as looking into possible scholarships.

> Michael: I'm gonna' have a couple of jobs after school. I like to work. I like money. If you like money, you like to work.
>
> Researcher: Yes.
>
> Michael: But whenever I get money, I don't spend it. I just put it up.
>
> Researcher: Good. That's a hard thing to do for most people. . . . Have you thought about scholarships?

> Michael: Yea. I'm going to try to play as many
> sports as I can without getting hurt, plus keep my
> grades up so I've a better chance of maybe getting a
> sports scholarship or academic scholarship.

He wanted to major in engineering at the local university,

Florida State University, or an all-black college in

Alabama. He thought it would probably be preferable to

attend the local university in order to be able to live at

home and reduce his expenses. "I want to work for NASA. I

want to build rockets." He said that he planned on waiting

to start a family until after he completed college; "I

might get married, but kids, starting a family and

everything, that'll have to wait. . . . Not 'til I'm

assured a job. A good job."

The School: Inner-City Middle School's Alternative Program

The program teacher, Mrs. Samples, was in her first

year of teaching. She previously worked as a social

services worker and said she felt confident in her

knowledge of the problems the at-risk students faced. Her

educational training focused primarily on working with

special education students. She favored a strictly

structured approach. On one occasion, after passing out

drill worksheets, she said that, although she did not

generally favor using rote instructional methods, she

really thought it was "the only way to teach some of these

kids".

Jaime reported, however, that she did not like the

alternative program for several reasons. One was because

she did not like Mrs. Samples or Mr. Warren. The main reason, though, was because she did not believe they were "taught right." She said that the other core courses learned different material, whereas the alternative class did lower-level work that was not important.

Mr. Warren, the classroom aide, was also a full-time counselor/supervisor at a facility for juvenile sex offenders run by the state. He said that he had taken on the job of classroom aide so that he could feel more productive by working "in the prevention stage, not the intervention stage". He said he had become burned out working with juvenile males who were "hard core" and unlikely to change their vicious and perverse behaviors. He saw their actions as a failure of the system to help the individual before the individual became too hardened and beyond help. He believed that he could better help by working with the at-risk students at Inner-City Middle School.

The students generally reported dislike for Mr. Warren. He was aggressive and confrontational, and said things like, "I told you to do it now" or "I'm in charge here and you'd better do what I told you." His hostile manner often provoked students to misbehave more than they might have otherwise. Mr. Warren reported that he viewed Mrs. Samples as an ineffectual teacher, and felt he was

forced into the role of "the bad guy" because she could not control the class.

Many of the faculty knew little about the at-risk program. Most seemed relieved that the "bad kids" were out of their classes. When questioned as to the whereabouts of the Mr. Warren, the teacher's aide, one of the teachers in the faculty lounge suggested looking "in that special ed room." When questioned further about the classroom's location, he gave directions to the at-risk classroom and identified Mrs. Samples as the teacher.

Mrs. Samples often described the students' families when explaining student behavior. "Leon has a real problem with authority figures, particularly white authority figures. His mother called me a white bitch to my face. She's a drug runner in _____ and so he's learned to be real distrustful of most everyone." She said that Michael's mother was "not real bright," and so could not even conceive of Michael graduating and going to college, much less providing any moral support. Her critical assessments of students' families were often voiced within hearing distance of other students.

The alternative curriculum included a mentoring program which paired Inner-City Middle's students with students from City High School. The program was implemented to provide the at-risk students with the opportunity to talk to older teenagers. The school

sponsored after-school gatherings throughout the year for

the mentor program. Jaime reported that her male mentor

demeaned and insulted her.

> Researcher: Somebody told me something about a pizza
> party last week. Did everybody go to that?
>
> Jaime: No. Just this class.
>
> Researcher: What's it for?
>
> Jaime: The alternative classes. We have to go. They
> pair us up with people from around here to talk to. I
> didn't like mine too much 'cause he called me a whore.
>
> Researcher: He called you a whore?
>
> Jaime: I asked him if we could go use the phone, so I
> could call my dad and tell him to pick me up after
> school. He goes, "Who you gonna' call--your pimp?"
>
> Researcher: That's not very nice.
>
> Jaime: I said, "I don't actually appreciate you
> talking about me that way," and left it at that. And
> then when we went downstairs, I was talking to one of
> my friends and then he goes, "Yea, I heard about that
> chick, she's a whore too." He goes, "Just like you.
> What corner do you stand on? Maybe I'll come pick you
> up sometime."

Jaime thought that her mentor had "certain ideas" about her

because she was a student in the at-risk classroom.

Michael believed that being in the alternative program

at Inner-City Middle caused him to be treated differently.

> Researcher: Do you think that being in the
> alternative class has made a difference for you?
>
> Michael: Yea. I shouldn't be in there. I should
> just be in a regular class.
>
> Researcher: So you don't think it's any good for you?
>
> Michael: Well, it has been good, 'cause I'm getting
> good grades. But still, I don't need to be in that
> type of class.

Researcher: Do you think it's been a disadvantage to
you at all to be in there?

Michael: Morally. No, not morally, but . . . [seemed
to be searching for the right words] In a way it has.
I don't know. They treat you differently in some
ways.

Researcher: Good or bad?

Michael: In a way bad, in a way good.

Researcher: How's it bad?

Michael: Well, I know it's an alternative class, but
for me it's like they're just picking out people who
get in trouble. And put them in that class. You
know? It's not right.

Researcher: So do you think that gives you sort of a
stigma, or a bad reputation?

Michael: It's just not the right thing to do.

Rural Middle School

Two students, Elizabeth and Jordan, were observed and
interviewed within Rural Middle's at-risk program; data
from those observations and interviews are contained in
this section. Data on the program and staff are also
contained in this section.

The Students

Elizabeth. Elizabeth was often ambivalent about
school. She wanted success, but popularity with her peers
was more of a priority. During her seventh-grade year, she
worried a lot about how others viewed her and if she was
accepted. Elizabeth routinely ridiculed herself in front
of others in class. "I can't do this," or "I look stupid
today." In Elizabeth's photo project, all of her pictures

were of her animals and her friends. The majority of the
pictures were posed pictures of three different friends.
The friends had dressed up, and were "modeling" for the
pictures. There were no pictures of Elizabeth herself or
of her family. She said, "We like to dress up. That's
what I wanted to show. Cool outfits and stuff."

In class, Elizabeth exhibited anxiety when the
students were told to form groups of their own choice for
cooperative-learning activities. She waited to see if
others would ask her to join their group, sometimes looking
downcast at her desk, other times saying loudly something
like "Oh, I'll just work alone, I guess." She always
looked relieved when invited to join others to work.

Elizabeth's best days were days when she perceived she
looked good and was noticed by others. For example,
towards the end of the school year, one of her friends cut
and colored her hair. She received a lot of attention from
both teachers and students. When interviewed at the end of
the day, she said "Everybody thought I looked great today.
I like my hair so much better this way."

In fact, Elizabeth spent much of her time thinking
about her physical appearance. In May of her seventh-grade
year, she was diagnosed as near-sighted. Subsequently, her
parents bought her a pair of glasses. Elizabeth said that
they improved her vision, but she did not like to wear
them. "I look funny." Her glasses were mysteriously lost

within one week; Elizabeth could not remember exactly where she'd left them or seen them last. Her parents could not afford to replace them.

When Elizabeth was asked at the end of the school year if she felt any different than she did at the beginning of the year, she replied, "I guess everybody else looks at me different. Thinks I'm all grown up now." When asked how she'd changed over the summer (approximately 8 weeks into the next school year) she said,

> I'm really popular now. Everybody likes me and wants to be my friend.
>
> Researcher: Why is that?
>
> Elizabeth: Because I lost 27 pounds and look a lot better.
>
> Researcher: And you think it's because you lost weight that they want to be your friend?
>
> Elizabeth: Well, I feel better about myself, too. And that probably shows. 'Cause I like myself better, other people do too.

Several of Elizabeth's eighth-grade teachers reported that she was more accepted among her peers than she had been the previous year. However, there were several cliques of popular girls who still made fun of Elizabeth and ostracized her from their groups.

> Researcher: Does Elizabeth seem to be fitting in better this year?
>
> Teacher: Yes. The kids definitely like her better. She seems much more in control and self-confident than she was last year.
>
> Researcher: She says she's really popular.

Teacher: Well, I know she wants to be. But in my
class there's a group of "the popular girls" who tell
her to "shut up" whenever she speaks up in class.
Most of the time they leave her alone, but they make
fun of her if she tries to speak out and get any
attention.

Elizabeth decided to seek popularity in a different

setting. Elizabeth worked at the nearby elementary school

for one period during the morning as a teacher's assistant.

During an interview approximately 10 weeks into the 1991-92

school year, Elizabeth described her new best friends.

I have a lot of friends. I was going out with a guy
over at that school--he's a sixth grader--but I was
going out with him. . . . Everybody says he's really
popular. And he has a lot of friends, and stuff. And
he is really popular and has a lot of friends. . . .
Everybody over there [the elementary school] is like
really, really, really nice.

While Elizabeth continued to work on resolving some of

her self-concept problems, she had not learned how to

control her academic life. At the end of the seventh-grade

year, Elizabeth reported that she was not sure how she

could do better in school the next year, except maybe to

"study harder." She wanted to do well so she would not

disappoint her parents.

After two months in the eighth grade, Elizabeth was

failing two of her seven classes with marginal passes in

two other classes. She believed that she needed to "maybe

work harder" or that someone should tell her social studies

teacher to "be less boring." Elizabeth was earning a B

average in a regular language arts class. Although the

language arts teacher reported that she and Elizabeth mostly "steered clear of each other" because of a personality conflict, she also described Elizabeth as much improved from the beginning of the previous year. Elizabeth learned some things in the alternative language-arts class which had put her ahead in her new class. She enjoyed her new success in the class, though she seemed a bit surprised.

After 12 weeks of the eighth grade, Elizabeth's grades seemed to have stabilized. She was still failing history; she was earning a marginal pass in science. Her language arts grade had slipped to a C+, but she was earning mostly B grades in chorus, physical education, teacher's assistant, and math. She earned a 2.16 average for the first quarter of eighth grade. Elizabeth reported that science and history were very difficult for her because of the amount of note taking required. She could not keep track of what was important and what was not necessary to write in her notes. In describing her quarter grades, she said, "History. I either got a D or an F in there too. . . . It's hard. It's getting easier 'cause we just got books. I won't have to take notes all the time." Science she described as "really, really, really hard." Her science teacher said:

> If you looked at Elizabeth in class on any given day, you'd say to yourself, "Here's a kid who's got it together." And she really hasn't been absent. That's not the problem. But if you look in the grade book,

she's got real mediocre and low scores. And the kids
are allowed to correct their assignments to get 100%.
She just doesn't.

Elizabeth compared her performance in language arts in

the 1991-92 school year (a C+) to the previous year, prior

to her placement in the alternative class (failing).

Researcher: In language arts you're doing a whole lot
better than you did before. . . . What's the
difference?

Elizabeth: I'm prepared for her. I don't know.

Researcher: You and she are getting along better?

Elizabeth: Yea.

Researcher: And that makes that much of a difference
in your grade?

Elizabeth: Um-huh [yes]. 'Cause I can do better.
She'll help more, now.

Researcher: So you think she's changed?

Elizabeth: [Nods affirmatively]

Her previous academic failures were often attributed

to others, therefore she had no control over them.

Researcher: When you were getting bad grades in
[that] class--how did that make you feel?

Elizabeth: Mad.

Researcher: Mad at her?

Elizabeth: Mostly at her 'cause I tried and some
grades I got good, and some grades I didn't. I tried
but she wouldn't help me or anything. In Home Ec I
did everything I was supposed to and she gave me a D+.
I didn't deserve that.

Researcher: And so you felt like you tried and you
knew how to do the stuff, had the ability, but she was
just penalizing you.

Elizabeth: She didn't like me.

Elizabeth's successes were described positively. She
reported, however, that she had little control in some
situations which caused her to fail.

> Researcher: [If you're praised by the teacher] how
> does that make you feel?
>
> Elizabeth: Good.
>
> Researcher: What do you think about?
>
> Elizabeth: Probably the effort I put in.
>
> Researcher: When you do well and you don't do as
> well, what do you see. . . Is there one big deciding
> factor? That you tried hard or didn't try hard, or do
> you feel like some things are easier for you than
> others?
>
> Elizabeth: Um. . . [long pause] Some things are
> easier than others. I was failing math, but now I'm
> passing well.
>
> Researcher: How did you do that?
>
> Elizabeth: Working.
>
> Researcher: A lot more effort?
>
> Elizabeth: Yea.
>
> Researcher: When you were failing before, did you
> know that you weren't trying very hard, or did you
> think?
>
> Elizabeth: I just thought I didn't know it. Couldn't
> do it. Before it was really hard, and now we're on
> fractions and it's easier for me.

Elizabeth also described science class as "too hard." She
explained, though, that a class being too hard did not mean
she did not have the ability.

> Researcher: So why are you failing, do you think?
>
> Elizabeth: It's too hard.

Researcher: Too hard for you? You just don't understand the stuff?

Elizabeth: I understand it. It's just too hard for me.

Researcher: I don't understand what you mean by "too hard" if you understand it.

Elizabeth: Well, it's just frustrating. You sit here taking all these notes, you have to study, take notes, do a lot of work and listen to the teacher and all that stuff.

Researcher: Too much stuff going on all at once?

Elizabeth: Yea.

Researcher: But you understand it?

Elizabeth: Yea. Too many tests and quizzes.

Although Elizabeth could not articulate her academic strategies, her overall performance had improved. Prior to her placement in the alternative program she was earning a 1.0, the semester of her placement that improved to a 1.2, and the first quarter of the following year she earned a 2.16 with only one failing grade.

Elizabeth, when asked to rate how she felt about school on a 1-10 scale (after eight weeks of the eighth grade), rated her eighth-grade year as an eight and her seventh-grade year as only a four. "It's much easier. . . I'm more used to the teachers." She was apprehensive about moving on to high school, however.

Researcher: What do you think about going to high school next year?

Elizabeth: I don't want to.

Researcher: How come?

Elizabeth: I don't know. I just don't want to. I want to stay back in eighth grade. I want to see all my friends.

Researcher: Yea, but they'll be going to ninth grade, won't they? Or are they?

Elizabeth: No, all my friends are in sixth grade. . . they'll be in seventh grade. And so I'd get to see all them. That'd be funner.

Elizabeth's home life was generally calm. She spent a lot of time with her older sister, however, who had quite a few problems. The sister was unmarried with three small children and, in the fall of 1991, was accused of abusing the youngest child.

My sister got him [the five-month-old baby] tooken away from her. Because he broke his arm in his crib. . . . She didn't know that. . . . She didn't know what was wrong until the next day. . . until she took him to the doctor. The doctor said that she did it. And she [the doctor] had no evidence that she [the sister] did it. . . . They took him away.

Elizabeth was certain that her sister had not abused the child. She explained, however, that her sister had led a difficult life. Her father had kicked the sister out of the house when she was 14, and she had lived in a succession of foster homes until she had her first child at the age of 16.

Jordan. Jordan was outspoken and friendly. For the most part, he was liked by his teachers and peers. Sometimes, though, his need to speak out and be noticed was a source of irritation to others. Jordan wanted to be liked by everyone, and talked quite a bit about his

friends. He said he had "changed" when he started his
seventh-grade year.

>Jordan: I've got more friends. A lot more. 'Cause
>I'm different this year.

>Researcher: So why did you decide to change and be
>different this year?

>Jordan: 'Cause it's a new school. I didn't know what
>the people were like. So I just thought I should
>change.

>Researcher: It paid off then?

>Jordan: Yea. I've got a lot of friends.

>Researcher: That's probably a real good feeling.

>Jordan: You can tell by looking at my yearbook.
>[Counts up autographs.] I have over 40 signatures.

>Researcher: Quite a few people. And you consider all
>of them to be your friends?

>Jordan: Uh-huh. [Nods yes emphatically.]

Much like Elizabeth, Jordan did not seem to have a
very clear idea of how to succeed. He stated on most
occasions that he was doing "better," even when he had just
received a bad mark. He attributed past poor grades to
illness and absenteeism. "I wasn't here half the semester.
I was either sick or I was pulled out. Couple family
problems. Wasn't here that much." Jordan could not
articulate any coping strategies for improving his grades
or classroom behavior. Earlier in the month, Jordan had
recounted that his math teacher had discussed with the
class resources for help, such as friends or parents.

>Researcher: So what sort of plans do you have for
>next year? What if you run into some problems?

Jordan: I don't know.

Researcher: Did you learn anything about how to handle difficulties? [Pause--no answer.]   This class helped you out, right?

Jordan: Yea.   'Cause it's smaller.

Researcher: So if that's not an option next year--if you're in a bigger class--and you start running into problems, what do you think you're going to do?

Jordan: [Pause]   I don't know.   Just ask the teacher. Study harder.

Researcher: You were telling me about a month or so ago about some things one of your teachers said to you about different resources, or something like that? People you could go to to get help?   [Doesn't remember, shakes his head.]   A teacher, or a parent, or another student?

Jordan: Oh, I know.   Yea.   Someone who understands.

Researcher: Does that seem like a practical thing to do?

Jordan: Yea.   I guess.   'Cause I'm getting better grades.

Frequently, Jordan waited until the last minute to complete assignments.   Because of this, the quality of his work often suffered.   For example, a major portion of his social studies grade depended on a written report about France.   Jordan received the assignment approximately four weeks before the due date.   For about a week, he collected as much information as he could find.   Then he waited until the night before the assignment was due to write his report.   Consequently, he ran out of time and his project was missing several required sections.

Jordan talked about test anxiety. "Most tests I just get so nervous about I just flunk." He said that he rarely did well on tests; on one seventh-grade mathematics test he earned an A and was extremely excited. "The kid right next to me was correcting it [the test] and I was like 'Whoa! No way!' He goes, 'Yea, look at it!' Pretty funny."

When asked how teacher praise made him feel, Jordan said, "Makes me feel good. I'm getting a compliment and it's just like. . . you achieved something.

> Researcher: Does it mean you're smart?
>
> Jordan: No. But see, what you do is you try to achieve more and more goals until you get up to high school and that's education. That's the diploma.
>
> Researcher: What makes you want to try to achieve more and more?
>
> Jordan: Teachers. Parents. Grades.

When asked how failing a test would make him feel, he said, "Makes you want to try even more."

> Researcher: Does it? Makes you want to try harder if you don't do well?
>
> Jordan: Yea.
>
> Researcher: Doesn't it frustrate you?
>
> Jordan: A lot!
>
> Researcher: It does both? You're frustrated but you want to try harder?
>
> Jordan: Yea.

Questioned whether he felt in control of his school successes and failures, Jordan maintained that he did.

'Cause I can work harder. Or take my homework and just throw it aside and do other things like I usually do. Well, I did. For a long time. . . . I just took everything and put it in my locker. I hardly ever took things home.

For the photo project, Jordan took all 24 pictures on the roll. He went through all of them and described who or what they were. He was then asked to choose approximately 10 for his "album" representing "Who Am I." He sorted through quickly and chose ten.

> Researcher: You went through those pictures pretty fast.
>
> Jordan: I was looking for the ones I'd picked out.
>
> Researcher: You'd already thought about it?
>
> Jordan: Yea.
>
> Researcher: O.K. And so tell me, why these? I notice these are all people and animal pictures.
>
> Jordan: Yea. These are my mom and dad. I had to put them in 'cause they're important to me. My aunt. I had to put her in. . . . I needed a picture of me in there. . . . And I had to get one of my dog Rusty. And Weiner [another dog]. . . . I had to have my brother in there. I needed my sister in there. That was the only o.k. one of my sister. And my little sister. And my grandma, of course.
>
> Researcher: If you had to summarize "I took these pictures to show my life because . . ." and finish the sentence?
>
> Jordan: Because everyone here means a lot to me.
>
> Researcher: So your world is people and animal oriented.
>
> Jordan: Yea.

Jordan talked mostly about his family and sports. He expressed the desire to be part of a group. He seemed most

secure when he could be in control of what was going on around him and be the center of attention.

When asked what makes a person successful in school, Jordan said, "Brains."

Researcher: Just the ability?

Jordan: That, and you've got to try. It's just hard.

Researcher: School's hard for you?

Jordan: Yea. There's harder subjects. Probably.

Researcher: Some of it more than other?

Jordan: Yea. The hardest subjects' probably English and math. The rest is just easy.

Researcher: But you said when you were failing last semester it was 'cause you weren't here. Not necessarily that it was hard for you?

Jordan: Well, it was harder when I was here.

Researcher: Is that because it was hard for you or because you missed so much?

Jordan: [Long pause] Sort of both.

Researcher: O.K. If you get a bad grade, how does that make you feel?

Jordan: Bad. Sometimes I try to just laugh it off. Try to get back on task. Try not to bother with it until next quarter.

Researcher: Just start over?

Jordan: That's what I did last quarter. [Pause] But I didn't do very good. [Looks downcast]

Jordan stated that he liked eighth grade better than he had the seventh grade. "I'd rate this year as an 'eight'. Last year was maybe a 'two'". He had some concerns, however, about his grades.

Jordan: First quarter was sort of "ugh".

Researcher: Is the quarter over?

Jordan: Yea. We just started the second quarter.
. . . I haven't been doing too good. Except in
English.

Researcher: What does that mean, "Not doing too
good?" Do you not turn in your work?

Jordan: I turn in my work. I always turn in my work,
it's just my scores. My scores aren't high. They're
really low.

Researcher: On your tests, you mean, or on your
papers?

Jordan: Both.

Researcher: And so what's the problem?

Jordan: [Nervous laughter, looks away] I don't know.

He talked about the problems he experienced with notes

and test-taking, much the same as Elizabeth had expressed.

Researcher: How about science?

Jordan: Mr. _____. He said I'm not doin' good, but
I'm not doin' bad. So it's about a D. C or a D. I
know it's not an F, though.

Researcher: O.K. And why did he say, or why do you
think that you're not doing as well in there?

Jordan: Well, my test scores aren't high. He said he
didn't really count on that. But he said the open-
note quizzes I'm getting low scores. 'Cause it's hard
just to sit down and take notes. That's one reason.
And another reason. I'd make an attempt at my work.
. . . I'd make an attempt, but he said that's it's
just my scores aren't really high. Well, that's
mostly what it is. They said they like working with
me this year 'cause I got a positive attitude.

Researcher: Do you think there's a change in your
attitude?

Jordan: Yea.

Researcher: And what's that due to?

Jordan: Well, it helps me 'cause I can get along with the teachers better. I don't have to fight with the teachers.

Researcher: Why is your attitude better this year than last?

Jordan: 'Cause I'm not hanging around with the kids I did last year. Last year I was hanging around with a real bad group. And this year I'm not. . . . I've got more seventh-grade friends than I do eighth-grade friends. . . . Last year there was like the big popularity group. . . . And in the seventh grade, there isn't a big popularity group.

Jordan explained that he needed to spend more time on his work and be a little more conscientious in order to improve his grades. He was confident that he could make those improvements.

Jordan: Shouldn't be no problem [improving his scores]. If I try harder.

Researcher: To get caught up?

Jordan: Well, I'm caught up. It's just my grades aren't [laughs]. I'm ahead of my grades--my grades are way back there. So I should slow down. Take it slower. Instead of trying to rush through everything and get it done.

The School: Rural Middle School's Alternative Program

The principal, Mr. Durnan, was more than willing to share his philosophy on at-risk programs. When informed the purpose of the study would be to investigate the perceptions of students and why they were at-risk, he said, "Well, I can answer that question. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, now does it? I've seen most of these kids' parents when they were students, and they were losers

too. You can't really do much when they come from families like these." His view of these students seemed to conflict with his desire to begin a special program to give them extra academic assistance. Further conversation, however, revealed that he believed the program might enhance the community's image of the school.

Mrs. Willowes' program seemed to provide the students with a "safe haven" in the turbulent world of the middle school. Students sometimes had difficulty making the transition from the one-teacher, small-community environment of the elementary school to the multi-teacher, multi-subject commotion of the middle school. Elizabeth said, "I knew everybody before and when you're a sixth grader you're important but when you're a seventh grader you're nobody again."

Elizabeth also reported that having the right teacher could make a big difference in a class grade. "I'm learning more because she's [the teacher] taking more time." Jordan said he was learning more in the alternative class " 'cause she [Mrs. Willowes] explains it more. . . . [She] goes over it thoroughly." Asked to describe a "perfect teacher," Elizabeth said, "Nice. And someone that knows what you're talking about and knows how to work on the same stuff as you. They'll take time and stuff, and not rush and stuff." Jordan explained how to persist, even after getting bad marks.

> Jordan: It's like, well, this teacher doesn't like
> me. So I'll just try to impress them and get them to
> like me. That's what my mom said. She said if a
> teacher don't like you, try to get them to like you.
> Be nice to them and try hard.
>
> Researcher: So you keep trying harder 'cause you
> think that that can make a difference?
>
> Jordan: Yea.

Mrs. Willowes put forth a great deal of time and effort with individual students. One boy, John, could only read on the second-grade level when he entered her class in February. Mrs. Willowes spent the first 10 minutes of each class period working with John on his reading while the rest of the class read silently. John's reading skills, self-esteem, and attitude improved considerably. During an interview with Jordan, John wandered over after finishing his work. He wanted to know what the interview was about. Jordan, repeating the question he had just answered, said, "Have you changed for the better this year and why?" John quickly said, "Well, of course I have. I can read now." His sense of pride was clearly evident.

Initially, Jordan and Elizabeth were unsure about the alternative class. But at the end of the year, they both reported that they believed they had learned more because of their placement in the class. Jordan said:

> This is a good class for people that need help. At
> first I didn't think I needed help. Then I had to go
> to the office and Mr. Durnan said, "This is a class to
> help you 'cause you failed and if you guys don't want
> to take it, you don't have to." Some kids said, "I
> don't think so, 'cause I'd have to take it again next
> year." But then I said I would.

Jordan said that the small class size and Mrs. Willowes'
willingness to work with the students had made a big
difference for him in language arts.

> Researcher: You think that that was what made the big
> difference between Mrs. Willowes' class at the
> beginning of the year and Mrs. Willowes' class at the
> end of the year, was that you were in that smaller
> class where you got more help?
>
> Jordan: Yea, when you're in smaller classes you get
> more one-on-one help.
>
> Researcher: So what about Mrs. ---'s class this year?
> How big a class is that?
>
> Jordan: It's not very. . . Well, it's big, but then
> it's not very big. It's like, something like 25 kids
> in there.
>
> Researcher: That's a lot. I mean, you were only in a
> class of eight last year. So eight, as opposed to 25,
> that's a big difference and you're getting a B+?
>
> Jordan: Well, last year I didn't really care for Mrs.
> _____, and this year she's all nice. She's really
> nice.
>
> Researcher: Do you think she's different, or do you
> think you're different?
>
> Jordan: I think we're both different. She likes me
> more 'cause--I think she likes me more because--I'm
> not running around with _____ anymore. Which was a
> really bad influence on me and everything.
>
> Researcher: But now, does that account for you
> getting a B+ in a big, regular class?
>
> Jordan: I'm trying harder. 'Cause I'm not really
> worrying about the people around me 'cause I know 'em
> better.
>
> Researcher: So you're not as much worried about
> socializing or being popular?
>
> Jordan: Yea.
>
> Researcher: Worrying more about your schoolwork.

Jordan: I'm just, like, being me now.

Elizabeth said, "In a smaller class I learned more than
last year. A lot more than last year." She also said that
Mrs. Willowes spent more time explaining.

> Elizabeth: [Mrs. Willowes] takes it slower and she
> spends time on it and in Mrs. _____'s class [regular
> teacher] she keeps going and going and going.

> Researcher: Just keeps going even if you don't know
> it?

> Elizabeth: Yea.

Mrs. Willowes worked with the students to teach them
how to function cooperatively within a classroom setting.
She spent time discussing self-esteem and teamwork,
reinforced with cooperative-learning activities which
emphasized social skills. Elizabeth said cooperative-
learning groups helped her because "everybody helps and
then you discuss all the answers and see which one sounds
best. . . . You could ask anybody in the group and they'd
help you." By the end of the school year, students often
worked together on projects, and encouraged each other on
individual activities. During a quiz, for example, one
student who finished early cheered on another student.
"Come on, Matthew, I know you can do it! I'm just going to
watch [you], 'cause I know you're going to finish soon."

During a group interview, the student in the seventh-
period alternative class described an "ideal teacher." One
student asserted that teachers do not necessarily have to
be smart. Instead, it was important for teachers to be

good with kids. All the students agreed, and also said that there should be more careful screening of teacher applicants. They said Mrs. Willowes was a good teacher because she was patient and understanding; they believed she cared about how they were doing.

Mrs. Willowes described her goals for the alternative students. "I want to give them the confidence and skills to find success in other settings." She was concerned that for Elizabeth's and Jordan's classes, however, she had given the students the self-assurance they needed without the academic skills to back them up. She believed that by the end of the 1990-91 school year, the students were sure that they were ready to move back into a regular classroom setting. But they were still lacking in some academics because she had not had enough time with them. She worried that she might be repeating that mistake in the 1991-92 school year. "[After the first 12 weeks of school] they're already telling me how smart they are. They think they don't need to be in my class. Maybe I've built them up <u>too</u> much."

Comparison Across Students

All four students are compared and contrasted in this section. Affective and academic reactions in school are described, as well as student perceptions of support from staff and parents.

Jaime, Michael, and Elizabeth all described feelings of having no one to talk to or of feeling alone. Michael lived with his mother and aunt and said he needed a male role model. Jaime's grandfather worked a lot, and Jaime was passed from relative to relative and boyfriend to boyfriend in her search for security. Elizabeth desperately wanted to be popular.

The four students had varying degrees of responsibility. Jaime rarely followed through with school-related commitments. She would promise her teachers she would come to school, but often only came for one or two days before being absent again. In another example, she failed to return several of her books at the end of the eighth grade, and refused to pay the fines. "I didn't want the books in the first place and it's not my fault my little brother tore them up." Elizabeth lost her glasses. Jordan failed twice to return a parent-permission slip. Finally, Mrs. Willowes had the slip signed at a parent conference.

Each of the students said that they alone were responsible for succeeding or failing. Jaime said that most of her failures were due to "bad habits," which she was going to work on changing "soon." Jordan said, "It's really all up to me." All four students, however, often cited teacher favoritism or teaching style when discussing low grades. "The teacher is boring," therefore Jordan was

unable to pay attention; "She doesn't like me," so
Elizabeth was graded unfairly; "She nags me all the time,"
causing Jaime to skip school.

Three of the four students (all except Michael)
largely blamed previous academic failure on absenteeism.
It seems that, for Jaime, Elizabeth, and Jordan at least,
poor attendance was perceived as an important factor in
school failure. They could do the work, but had been
absent too frequently. Elizabeth and Jaime improved their
attendance from fall to spring of the 1990-91 school year,
however, but did not significantly improve their grades.
The students did not believe they could not do the work
(lack of ability) when they failed, but instead said they
had not tried.

All of the students who participated in the study
reported that middle school was much more difficult than
elementary school. They responded to the question, "What's
the difference between elementary and middle school?"

Jaime: Middle school's harder. Classes. Teachers.
I'd never had an "F" in my life 'til I came here.

Jordan: Grade school is easy 'cause you can just
breeze through the classes and get your teacher's help
on anything, any time of the day. Here it's at lunch,
or after school.

When questioned about their feelings about receiving
failing grades, all the students reported feeling dismayed,
but thought they could do better.

Jaime: I felt bad, 'cause my mom and my dad were both
disappointed and I knew I could do better. But now

I'm starting to get my grades back up. And my dad's got more trust in me now.

Michael: I'll just work harder. Study. Get my grades up.

None of the students were realistic about their academic situation; failing grades could always be improved to excellent grades. Elizabeth said, "Well, I got an F this time, but next time I'll get an A because I know I'm going to get an A." The students seemed to think that believing their grades would improve would be enough to make it happen. Academic improvement strategies were vague, at best. "Just pay attention as good as you can." Or, "Be good and you'll do great."

None of the students reported receiving academic support from their parents. Their parents were either not interested, or expressed active disbelief in the student's ability. Rather than providing concrete suggestions for improvement or assisting with schoolwork, parents were perceived by the students as judgmental and disapproving. "They were really mad at me. . . They probably think that I can do better." "She [my mom] doesn't think I'll go [to college]. . . . 'Cause I act up in school."

The students generally believed that teachers were unfair and unhelpful. "I don't think Mrs. _____ likes me," "I tried but she wouldn't help me or anything," or "She thinks I'm getting smart and she'll just send me out, stuff like that." They all seemed to think that grading

methods were unclear or arbitrary. Elizabeth said she had been told by her social studies teacher that she had only earned 25 percent of the total possible points in the grading period, and declared:

> I don't believe him, though, because I've been getting
> better grades than that. I was going to go up and
> talk to him. He marked some things off--like what I
> was doing, and he marked them off that I wasn't doing
> them. So I was going to go talk to him. See if he'd
> change my grade. Because I don't believe him.

Comparison Between Schools

In this section, Rural Middle and Inner-City Middle are compared and contrasted. The two school's alternative programs were structured and taught very differently; the students in Rural Middle's program responded much more positively than did those in Inner-City's program.

The definitions of "at-risk" at the two schools involved in this study were very different. At Inner-City Middle School, students were targeted for a combination of failing grades, misbehavior, and perceived low self-esteem. At Rural Middle School, misbehaving students were not allowed in the program. Instead, the students in that program were receiving failing grades but were not discipline problems. The students in Inner-City's alternative program were definitely "tougher" kids than the students in Rural Middle's alternative program.

The program at Inner-City Middle included a three-period core class, whereas the program at Rural Middle was only one 45-minute class. The students at Inner-City spent

more than three times as long each day with Mrs. Samples than the students at Rural Middle spent with Mrs. Willowes. However, the students at Inner-City did not seem to like Mrs. Samples, and resented having to spend so much time with her. They believed that neither she nor Mr. Warren liked them. In contrast, Rural Middle's students reported enjoying Mrs. Willowes' class and believed that she cared for them as well.

Both Mrs. Ferguson (Inner-City Middle) and Mrs. Willowes (Rural Middle) concentrated a great deal of their time on making the students feel comfortable and confident. Mrs. Willowes believed that she had not had enough time to make considerable academic progress with the students, but that she had given them the opportunity to feel good about themselves and positive about school. Although Mrs. Ferguson worked with the students to make them feel secure, because of her numerous responsibilities, she was not able to spend much time with the class as a whole. Consequently, the mood in the classroom on most days was determined by Mrs. Samples. Mrs. Samples, unfortunately, was insecure in her own right and so could not contribute much guidance to the students.

In both programs, students believed they were seen as different from other students, whether it was because they were in "bonehead" math, or because they were separated out for the core classes. At Inner-City Middle, students

reported feeling stigmatized by their placement in the program. Both Michael and Jaime said they did not think that Mrs. Samples was a good teacher, and that they should not have been in the alternative program. In fact, both thought the program penalized students because they learned less, were exposed to different curriculum, and were viewed differently by others because of their placement in the program.

At Rural Middle, both students knew they had been separated out for previous failures, but they believed that the extra attention was helpful. Elizabeth and Jordan thought that Mrs. Willowes cared about them and put in extra effort to help them and make sure they understood the work. They both thought that the alternative program had benefitted them. The smaller class size and Mrs. Willowes' willingness to help had made them feel more positive about language arts.

Both programs espoused the goal of teaching the students coping skills, both academic and affective. Mrs. Willowes was, by the students' reports, more effective at teaching academic skills than was Mrs. Samples. Although Elizabeth and Jordan were still marginal in several of their classes, they were both maintaining a B/C average in a regular language-arts classroom in the eighth grade. Michael and Jaime, however, did not believe that they had

learned much in the alternative core at Inner-City Middle. Neither is doing well at City High School.

Elizabeth improved her grade point slightly after placement in the alternative program, from a 1.0 average in the fall of 1990 to a 1.2 average in the spring of 1991. Jordan's grades improved much more dramatically, from a 1.2 average in the fall of 1990 to a 2.4 average in the spring of 1991. In regular classes in the fall of 1991, Jordan earned a 2.2 average and Elizabeth earned a 2.16 average. Both students improved during and after placement in the program. In contrast, Jaime's and Michael's grades dropped dramatically after placement in regular classes at City High School. Jaime earned approximately a 2.7 throughout her eighth-grade year; she earned no credit in any of her classes for the first quarter at City High. Michael earned about a C average throughout eighth grade, but failed two of his first quarter classes, with marginal grades in his other subjects, for the first quarter at City High.

Affectively, all four students were still struggling in the 1991-92 school year. Elizabeth and Jordan came out of the seventh grade feeling at least a little bit more positive about themselves because of Mrs. Willowes' efforts. Their desire to be popular and feel worthwhile seemed normal for their age.

Several of Elizabeth's and Jordan's eighth-grade teachers reported that they were both more positive about

school and more mature. Although neither had modified all their behaviors, they both said they felt much more positive about school in their eighth-grade year.

Michael and Jaime, however, seemed to have the same negative pattern of problems at City High as they did at Inner-City Middle. Neither of them had learned how to control their behaviors or their environment.

The fact that Michael and Jaime were making the transition to high school could be a possible explanation for their poor performance in the 1991-92 school year. However, their behaviors at City High were not much different from their behaviors at Inner-City Middle. They both had the same complaints about teachers, the same academic habits, and the same attendance patterns. Mrs. Samples had given both Jaime and Michael above average grades, but her grading policy often excused Jaime's absences and Michael's missing work.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter contains an overview of the study, relationship of the findings to previous research, implications of findings for research, implications of findings for practitioners, and recommendations. At-risk students and programs, tracking, and Weiner's model are discussed as they relate to this study.

The purpose of this study was to determine the attributions of at-risk students who had been tracked into an alternative program at the middle-school level and identify the implications for school organization. The "at-risk" population in the educational system of the United States is growing rapidly (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Research into the at-risk and dropout problem has focused on the high-school-aged student and quantitative data collection (Tidwell, 1988). There are few qualitative studies, however, that investigate the behaviors and motivations of at-risk students prior to dropping out, particularly at the middle-school level (Catterall & Stern, 1986; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1988).

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In this study of attributions of at-risk students who
had been tracked into alternative programs, an embedded,
single-case design was utilized. The overall unit of
analysis in this study was the alternative-education
setting. Two schools were chosen as subunits of analysis.
One rural and one urban school were chosen in order to
explore possible differences and similarities within
divergent settings; faculty and staff were observed and
interviewed. At another level of analysis, two students
were chosen from each school for observation and interview.
This sampling technique allowed for indepth exploration of
students' attributions.

Observations and interviews were conducted over the
course of approximately six months in the 1990-91 school
year and follow-up interviews were conducted in the fall of
the 1991-92 year. Observation data were recorded by hand
or on computer for field notes. Formal interviews were
recorded and transcribed. Unstructured interview data were
entered into a journal log, along with observer comments.

Attribution theory, specifically Weiner's (1979, 1980,
1982, 1985, 1987) theory of achievement motivation and
emotion was chosen to guide initial observations and
interviews. This study included unstructured interview
time in an attempt to gain the maximum amount of
information possible and to allow participants the
opportunity to introduce information they believe to be

relevant. In this study, data were analyzed at each level within the framework of attribution theory and the literature on tracking and at-risk youth. Pattern-matching was utilized as the primary mode of data analysis.

The following broad questions guided data collection:

1. Considering Weiner's three dimensions of locus of causality, controllability, and stability, does attribution theory provide a framework for explaining and predicting the behaviors of at-risk students?

2. Do students in at-risk programs demonstrate a propensity to attribute <u>causality</u> of negative events externally?

3. Do students in at-risk programs view themselves as in <u>control</u> of the events that affect their lives?

4. Do at-risk students perceive of causal events as <u>stable</u> or unstable?

<u>Application of Findings to Research Questions</u>

In this study, four students who had been tracked into alternative-education programs at the middle-school level were observed and interviewed. Reactions of the students to various events, both academic and affective, were considered within Weiner's (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1987) framework.

Weiner (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1987) conceptualized his achievement theory of motivation and emotion within three dimensions: locus of causality, stability, and

controllability. Locus of causality may be internal or external. For example, lack of effort is an internal attribution, whereas a too difficult task is external. Stability is the temporal nature of a cause, either enduring or changing. Lack of ability is construed as stable; bad luck is unstable. Controllability is the degree of volitional influence that can be exerted over a cause. Effort can be controlled, for example, whereas ability cannot.

Each dimension is associated with a number of psychological consequences. Emotions such as pity, shame, gratitude, hopelessness (hopefulness), pride (self-esteem), guilt, and anger result from the individual's attributions of causality within Weiner's three dimensions.

The locus dimension affects self-esteem. Attributions to internal factors for success increase self-worth (Robison-Awana, Kehle, & Jenson, 1986), whereas attributions to internal factors for failure decrease self-esteem. The stability dimension relates to changes in expectancy of success and failure and also regulates affective reactions. Feelings of hopelessness may result when the future is seen as stable and negative and the individual sees no hope of change for the better. Finally, the controllability dimension of causality affects sentiments and evaluations of others.

> If another person fails or is in need of aid
> because of a controllable cause, such as lack of

effort, then that person often elicits anger and
is negatively evaluated. On the other hand, if
failure or need is due to an uncontrollable cause
such as a physical handicap, then that person
elicits sympathy and is positively evaluated.
(Weiner, 1983, p. 531)

Changes in expectancy of success, Weiner (1985)

claimed, were influenced by the perceived stability of the

cause of the event. He proposed three corollaries to what

he termed the "expectancy principle."

1. If the outcome of an event is ascribed to a
stable cause, then that outcome will be
anticipated with increased certainty, or with an
increased expectancy, in the future.
2. If the outcome of an event is ascribed to an
unstable cause, then the certainty or expectancy
of that outcome may be unchanged or the future may
be anticipated to be different from the past.
3. Outcomes ascribed to stable causes will be
anticipated to be repeated in the future with a
greater degree of certainty than are outcomes
ascribed to unstable causes. (p. 559)

Bar-Tal (1982) summarized the attribution process as

follows:

Pupils who tend to attribute success to internal,
mainly stable or controllable, causes, and who
attribute failure to internal-unstable-
controllable causes, tend to exhibit adaptive,
mastery-oriented achievement behavior. That is,
they tend to approach rather than avoid
achievement tasks, tend to persist in the face of
failure, and tend to perform achievement tasks
with greater intensity. Pupils who tend to
attribute success to external causes and failure
to internal-stable-uncontrollable causes show a
very different pattern. These pupils tend to
exhibit maladaptive, helpless achievement
behavior. That is, they tend to avoid achievement
tasks, tend to give up in the face of failure and
do not perform achievement tasks with great
intensity. (p. 190)

Weiner (1983) also argued that it is important to consider attributions within the framework of the subject's perception. That is, although effort may generally be considered unstable, that may change to a stable trait if the person views himself or herself as lazy.

Although the behaviors of the students differed in many respects, some interesting similarities emerged. All four students, despite their histories of academic failure, contended that they could succeed if they chose. Lack of effort was cited as the primary cause for failure (internal/unstable/controllable). All of the students believed that they had the ability to succeed (internal/ stable/controllable). In some instances they attributed failure to a too difficult task (external/unstable/ uncontrollable). Failure was never attributed to an internal and stable cause; according to Weiner's theory, such an attribution would result in a negative self-concept.

All four students persisted in the face of failure, although to varying degrees. Mrs. Willowes' alternative class seemed to have given Elizabeth and Jordan both an academic and an affective advantage in the language arts class in the subsequent school year. Elizabeth and Jordan both reported that they could succeed in school; their eighth-grade year was rated as much better than their seventh-grade year had been. Both students improved their

academic marks after their placement in the alternative program. However, both were still struggling in their classes with more rigorous academic requirements: copious note taking, stricter grading, numerous tests and quizzes, or higher grading standards.

Michael and Jaime seemed to have gained little, if any, benefit from Inner-City Middle School's alternative program. Michael's and Jaime's persistence seemed due more to their own psychological make-up than from anything the alternative program had taught them. In fact, Michael conscientiously attended school and seemed to want to succeed. Jaime, however, attended school sporadically. Her teachers reported that she was generally passive in class and worked on her assignments. She did not make up missed work, nor did she seem enthused about school when she was in attendance.

Mrs. Willowes had given much positive encouragement to Elizabeth and Jordan in only about four months in the classroom. Neither could articulate, however, how to succeed at school in general. Both improved their behavior and grades in the subsequent school year. They reported that Mrs. Willowes had provided individual attention and caring which gave them the feeling that they were capable of succeeding.

Neither program had a specific curriculum to increase self-esteem or to teach academic skills. However, Mrs.

Willowes continually revised her lesson plans in an attempt
to accommodate the learning pace and feelings of the
students. Mrs. Willowes reported that she believed she
should have emphasized study skills more in Elizabeth's and
Jordan's classes, but said that she had run out of time.
She was attempting to correct that in the alternative class
in the 1991-92 school year by specifically teaching skills
such as note taking, test taking, and organization.

Content, not process, was emphasized in Mrs. Samples'
classroom. Consequently, students were not able to
transfer gains (if made) to other classes or into the
following school year. The students were exposed to a
diluted version of the regular curriculum and offered no
specific strategies for academic or affective success.
Mrs. Samples made the assumption that students were unable
to cope with level of curriculum taught in the regular
classes; in fact, Jaime and Michael seemed to be perfectly
capable of doing more difficult work. Both needed to be
challenged in their schoolwork and motivated to attend and
succeed.

Weiner's theory serves as a basis for explanation and
prediction of these students' behaviors. In an effort to
maintain self-concept and control of their environments,
the students have attributed failure to either unstable or
uncontrollable causes. Consequently, they can maintain

some expectancy of future success, because the failures are not due to internal, stable, and/or controllable causes.

In Inner-City's alternative program, students were not provided with academic or affective strategies for success. In the following school year, neither Jaime nor Michael were experiencing much success. Elizabeth and Jordan, however, improved their affective and academic performance in a regular classroom setting at Rural Middle School. Weiner's theory of achievement motivation and emotion may serve as a beginning point for constructing instructional approaches and curriculum that would better serve the needs of at-risk students. Providing the students the opportunity to feel successful and secure in a classroom environment seemed to make a definite difference for Elizabeth and Jordan.

Relationship of Findings to Previous Research

The results of this study are related to previous research in several different areas. The literature on at-risk, tracking, and attribution theory guided this research and is related to the present study.

At-Risk Students and Programs

All four participants in this study exhibited characteristics typical of at-risk students. Researchers (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Levin, 1989; Svec, 1986; Valverde, 1987; Wells, 1990) have found that at-risk students demonstrate behaviors such as absenteeism,

truancy, nonparticipation in school-related activities,
disruptive classroom behavior, and delinquency. In
addition, at-risk students have often been retained at
least one grade level, have ethnic ancestry, low
socioeconomic status, inadequate social skills, and are
male. Absenteeism was a problem for three of the four
students involved in this study. Disruptive (attention-
seeking) behavior was exhibited by all four students,
though to varying degrees. All four participants were
considered "typical" at-risk students in their programs.

There is a paucity of literature on the effectiveness
of at-risk programs in retaining students at the middle-
school level. Coleman and Hoffer (1987), utilizing the
"High School and Beyond" data, concluded that Catholic
schools are more effective than public schools at retaining
at-risk students. More personalized attention and means
for student involvement were identified as key program
attributes. In this study, Mrs. Willowes (Rural Middle)
made earnest efforts to provide affective interaction. The
comfort level of her students increased in language arts.
The gains did not initially appear to transfer to school in
general. However, after an adjustment period at the
beginning of the eighth-grade school year, both Elizabeth
and Jordan stabilized their grades in regular classes.
Both were achieving higher marks and were reported as

behaviorally improved by their teachers than they had prior to placement in the alternative program.

Mrs. Ferguson (Inner-City Middle) provided counsel and support to her students; however, Mrs. Samples, the classroom teacher, generally contributed a negative attitude which was reflected in the overall classroom environment. Students disliked Mrs. Samples and Mr. Warren and did not want to attend the at-risk class. Students often ignored the teacher and seemed to incite each other to misbehave.

Jaime became pregnant at the age of 13; early pregnancy is not uncommon for teenagers who exhibit other at-risk characteristics (MacLeod, 1987). Such behavior may be explained as an alternative to schooling, that is, the teenager can use motherhood as an occupation, relieving herself of the obligation to attend school in preparation for other work.

Tracking

The students who participated in this study had been removed from regular classes for some portion of the school day because they were considered to be at risk of school failure. Both of the programs observed in this study used what is undoubtedly a form of tracking. Students were tracked by their past academic performance and/or behaviors. However, neither program could be strictly classified as ability or curriculum tracking. Students

generally represented a wide range of abilities and outcome goals.

The literature on tracking is extensive; there is little research on the effects of isolating at-risk students. Within the existing literature on tracking, there are two overlapping bodies of research: effects of tracking on academic achievement and effects of tracking on the affective domain.

Academic achievement. Researchers on tracking have generally concluded that the overall academic effects of ability grouping are negligible for students of all levels (Noland & Taylor, 1986; Oakes, 1990; Slavin, 1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b). The students who participated in this study all received passing marks within their alternative programs. They generally received low marks in other academic classes and better marks in elective classes such as chorus and home economics. In the subsequent academic year, the two students from Inner-City's alternative program were earning grades similar to their grades prior to placement in the program--failing or only marginally passing. Rural Middle's students, however, had improved their overall performance. They both still experienced difficulty with several of their required subjects, but their teachers reported that they were both working harder than they had prior to their placement in the alternative program.

Researchers have also argued that tracking restricts access to educational opportunities (Hallinan, 1987b; Oakes, 1989, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1980). The curriculum in both programs differed from the standard school curriculum. At Inner-City Middle, the teacher provided a battery of worksheets and rote drills. The students reported that the work was too easy and generally boring. They also recognized that students in other classes were taught differently. At Rural Middle School, the curriculum differed primarily because the teacher had not taught the class before. Consequently, she was continually revising her lesson plans and goals to match the learning pace of the students. The students believed that this was in their best interest and allowed them to "catch up."

The affective domain. Metz (1978) concluded that low-track students developed an alienated and separate attitude towards school. Similarly, Schwartz (1981) posited that "low-streamed students adopt an anti-academic subculture. Status in this group is based on defiance of school and teacher norms" (p. 101). The students from Inner-City Middle seemed to regard school as a chore, something to endure until a better option came along. Both Michael and Jaime believed that earning a degree was important but did not believe that school was a worthwhile experience. Classwork was viewed as having little relevance to real

life. With few exceptions, the students believed that they were treated unfairly or arbitrarily by teachers.

Jaime had no role models who exhibited positive attitudes about education. She had no consistent female friendships; the people who shaped her views were primarily her aunts and her various boyfriends. None of her aunts graduated from high school and all had children before the age of 18. None of her boyfriends had graduated from high school. She reported that none of these people viewed school as a priority. Michael wanted to graduate from high school and attend college, but said he had little reinforcement from home. He said that his friends were often in trouble in class for talking and acting out, the same as he was. He did not believe that he had learned much from Inner-City's alternative program. He reported feeling negatively towards Mrs. Samples and his other teachers.

The students in Mrs. Willowes' class, however, developed a positive attitude towards Mrs. Willowes as a teacher and towards language arts in general. All the students reported liking the class. Group interviews revealed that the students believed they had benefitted from placement in the class because of the individualized attention. Only two of the students were retained in the alternative class in the following school year. Elizabeth and Jordan reported feeling more positively towards school

and about their ability to cope with the demands of middle
school.

Tracking the at-risk student. Catterall (1987), in a
study of intensive group counseling effects on at-risk
students, found that the group counseling program resulted
in group bonding and alienation from the traditional school
program.

> Little of a positive nature appeared to spill over
> into the post-treatment regular classroom work and
> behavior of participants, nor were positive
> comparisons for treatment subjects reflected on an
> assessment of their basic self-concepts and attitudes
> towards fellow students, teachers, or the school.
> . . . [The interventions] simply do not comprise an
> overwhelming social intervention, especially when the
> problem under attack had resulted from a decade of
> negative school experiences for many of the subjects.
> (p. 532)

All of the students involved in this study recognized their
differential status as at-risk students, although to
varying degrees. At Inner-City Middle, dislike of the
teacher and the classes seemed to be reinforced among the
students. Students encouraged each other's misbehavior
with laughter and comments. Students reported that their
placement in the program was unfair; they believed that
they were stigmatized or handicapped by their placement in
an at-risk class.

At Rural Middle, students expressed their belief that
they received extra attention in the at-risk class and
consequently reacted positively towards the teacher.
Students referred to the alternative math class, however,

as "bonehead math" and disliked the teacher. The

interaction between the teacher and the students in both

schools seemed to have a direct relationship on the

students' attitudes towards and behavior in their classes.

Weiner's Achievement Motivation and Emotion Model

Weiner's revised theory (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985)

focused on the affective reactions of individuals to

success and failure. Weiner theorized that the affective

reactions governed by locus of causality, stability, and

controllability should hold true in social settings as well

as academic ones. However, the majority of the research

employing Weiner's revised model utilized achievement

situations (Evans & Engelberg, 1988). Research relating

Weiner's model to affect have predominately centered on

alcoholism, loneliness, and depression (Guttmann, 1982).

Weiner's theory has not been applied to at-risk

students. However, attributions of students in this study

followed those advanced by Weiner. For example, students'

failures were attributed either externally or, if

attributed internally, to unstable or uncontrollable causes

(e.g., lack of effort or too difficult task). According to

Weiner's theory, this allows the student to maintain a

positive self-concept. Success was attributed to internal,

controllable causes such as effort.

This was true not only for academic tasks, but for

affective outcomes as well. For example, Elizabeth

reported that her new popularity, perceived by her as a success, was due to her efforts at losing weight, improving her appearance, and "being a better person." She perceived her new status as something she earned by her efforts, which consequently improved her self-concept. In contrast, Jordan began having trouble in his relationship with his stepbrother. He attributed the problem entirely to his stepbrother. "He thinks he's cool now at his new school, but he's really just a jerk. He's different than he was before." Jordan perceived the conflict with his stepbrother to be the result of external, unstable, uncontrollable causes. Rather than believe that he had any part in the problem, he chose to attribute all the blame to his stepbrother.

Elizabeth and Jordan were reported by their teachers to have only average skills. Michael and Jaime, however, were considered by their teachers to have at least above-average intellects. Mrs. Willowes' class provided for and emphasized success and allowed students to internalize those successes. Elizabeth and Jordan reported feeling positively about their ability to succeed and therefore continued to persist, even when classes were difficult for them. Mrs. Samples' class, however, provided negative experiences on a day-to-day basis. Students were given passing marks on grade reports, but in the daily classroom setting were chastised for laziness and misbehavior.

Students persisted in a half-hearted sort of way. They tried not to internalize failure, but both Jaime and Michael had entered a cycle of destructive behavior and academic performance at City High. Neither seems likely to succeed in the high-school setting.

Implications of Findings for Research

A number of findings in this study may have implications for other research in the area of tracked, at-risk adolescents. First, research in similar settings with similar methods would increase the depth of the literature in this area. The qualitative methods used in this study impose certain conditions on the generalizability of the results.

A new form of tracking has been instituted in the American educational system. Students considered to be at risk are separated from other students for differential instruction and curriculum. Laosa (1984) wrote:

> In every era of U.S. history since colonial times, the nature of social policies toward children has been such that the children of some ethnic, racial, and language groups have been systematically isolated and excluded from preparations for full participation in the responsibilities and rewards of full citizenship. (p. 93)

Research into the differential treatment of these students is crucial. Specifically, are students in at-risk programs afforded disparate access to educational opportunities? Oakes (1990) argued that disadvantaged, minority, and inner-city students are treated differently within the

school system. "Teachers serving large proportions of these students place somewhat less emphasis on such essential curriculum goals as developing inquiry and problem-solving skills" (p. x). Researchers have shown that these are the students who are generally characterized as at risk.

Another issue requiring additional research is the qualifications of teachers of at-risk programs. Oakes (1990) asserted that most secondary schools place their least qualified teachers with low-ability classes and their most qualified teachers with high-ability classes. Is this true of at-risk programs as well? Both of the teachers in this study were first-year teachers. Yonek (1991), in a pilot study for this research, observed and interviewed an at-risk program in which both of the teachers were first-year teachers. Novice teachers have less experience to draw upon. Teaching an at-risk population probably requires a more extensive repertoire of techniques than that possessed by a first-year teacher.

Rural Middle School's students attended only one period daily of alternative classes, whereas Inner-City Middle School's students attended a three-period block in the at-risk program. Yet Rural's students performed better the following year than did Inner-City's. More research comparing results of programs with more similar time constraints would be helpful. Also, the two students from

Inner-City's program were attempting to make the transition to high school at the conclusion of this study. Rural's students, although they were enrolled in regular classes, were still in the same school setting. Longitudinal research could provide additional insight into long-term student successes. Mrs. Willowes reported that her eighth-grade students from the 1990-91 alternative class who had gone on to high school were passing all their classes. Longitudinal research could focus on the transition of alternative-program students from middle to high school, as well as from at-risk to regular classes.

Finally, further research on Weiner's achievement motivation and emotion model in the at-risk setting is warranted. For example, are attributions mediated by cultural background (Guimond, Begin, & Palmer, 1989; Willig, Harnisch, Hill, & Maehr, 1983) or gender? Do these attributions persist over the length of the student's school career?

Implications of Findings for Practitioners

There may be implications for applying Weiner's theory to modify academic and affective behaviors in an at-risk setting. In this study, students responded to success and failure, both academic and affective, in accordance with Weiner's theory. Students attributed success to internal and controllable causes, which increases self-esteem. Students attributed failure, however, to external or

unstable causes, in an attempt to maintain self-esteem
(Weiner, 1988). Educators, recognizing this, could
structure educational experiences for at-risk students that
would provide additional opportunities for success. In
addition, attributional training could help students
identify their own negative attributional patterns.

A more fundamental implication of this research for
at-risk programs, perhaps, is for the organizational
structure of at-risk programs within the school system. A
plethora of at-risk programs has appeared, with little or
no rationale for their creation or evaluation. At-risk
programs, to be warranted, should address the particular
affective and academic needs of their students. Uhlenberg
and Eggebeen (1986) asserted:

> It is an erosion of the bond between parent and child
> --one characterized by parental commitment and
> willingness to sacrifice self-interest--that is a
> significant cause of the declining well-being of
> adolescents after 1960. (p. 38)

Ideally, the goals of an at-risk program should include the
same commitment and willingness to sacrifice from its
faculty that Uhlenberg and Eggebeen argued as key to the
parent-child relationship.

Programs must serve the needs of the students, rather
than dwelling on past failures. Mr. Ford, co-director of
the summer program at Inner-City Middle, contended that
there was no point in labeling families as functional or

dysfunctional, or kids as at-risk or normal. "We're all dysfunctional to some degree."

> Instead of talking about how many strikes a kid has against him, let's get in and show him how to make choices. Living right is just about making the right choices. Some of the students don't know that they have alternatives. Just ask any kid--they know the difference between right and wrong. So don't sit around and tell them they're stupid when they make a bad choice. Just help them figure out what their options are and how to do it right next time.

Mrs. Samples, at Inner-City Middle, spent little time discussing affective strategies with students. Instead, she berated students for inappropriate behavior, which seemed to encourage students to act out more in defiance. Mrs. Samples also did not tailor the program to the academic needs of the students. Students were resentful of the low level of instruction and material. They said that they were treated differently than other students.

In contrast, Mrs. Willowes spent much of her time trying to make the students feel good about themselves, both affectively and academically. This seemed to carry over, to some extent, to regular classes in the following school year. The students maintained a positive attitude about school and most of their teachers. They believed that they had the ability to succeed.

Recommendations

Research on at-risk programs has concentrated on high school students. Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh (1987)

detailed the components of an effective program for the high-school-age group:

1. Administration and organization: alternative programs such as schools-within-a-school or independent alternatives, small, personalized programs.

2. Teacher culture: teachers take on an "extended role," considering problems in the home, community, or peer group. Collegial relationships and professional cooperation promote enthusiasm and skill development.

3. Student culture: a voluntary program requiring that students apply and maintain commitment to rules, work expectations, and standards of behavior. The program also utilizes peer-monitored behavior and stresses a "family" atmosphere.

4. Curriculum: individualized, clear objectives, prompt feedback, and an active role for students. Experiential learning provides for improved social skills, social experiences, and development of responsibility.

The causal attributions of the students in this study, along with their perceptions of the programs they were placed in, would seem to suggest similar guidelines. There appears to be a definite need for evaluation of the effectiveness of such programs, for affective as well as academic outcomes.

Rural Middle's alternative-education students reported that they were offered individual attention, were liked by

their teacher, learned cooperative behavioral strategies, and experienced interesting learning activities. Inner-City's students, however, stated they felt isolated within the alternative classroom, did not like their teacher, seemed to develop a negative subculture, and believed the alternative curriculum was unchallenging and uninteresting.

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Dear Parent,

     I am a graduate student at the University of Florida in the Department of Educational Leadership. As part of my dissertation research I am gathering information on middle school students' feelings about their school experiences. I am working with two schools in the _____area. I would like your permission to interview your child as part of this study.

     I will arrange meetings with your child during the school day. Over the course of the school year, I will spend approximately 45 minutes per week with your child at school. All interviews will be prearranged with your child's teacher and will not interfere with classroom assignments or tests.

     Your child will be asked questions about school and his/her emotions regarding school. For example, I will ask your child to describe likes/dislikes of classes and teachers, goals after finishing school, and feelings about success/failure on assignments. I will also ask your child to take a set of photographs reflecting his/her representation of the world. The set of photographs will become the property of your child.

     All participation in this study is voluntary. You and your child have the right to withdraw participation at any time. Your child may choose not to answer any question she/he does not want to answer. Participation is not related to grades or class evaluations. There will be no payment for participation in this study. All information from interviews is confidential. Each child will be assigned a pseudonym which will be the only name appearing on any written documents resulting from this project. Your child will not be named or identified in the study in any way.

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I have explained the purpose of my study to your child and your child has indicated an interest in participating in this study. Please discuss this with your child, and if you are willing to have your child be interviewed, sign, date and return this form. A duplicate copy is enclosed for you to keep.

I can be contacted at home (206-896-9368 collect) or you may leave a message with your child's teacher (_____) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Mary M. Yonek

I have read and I understand the procedure described above. I agree to allow my child to participate in Mary Yonek's study and I have received a copy of the description.

Student Name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Second Parent/Witness _____

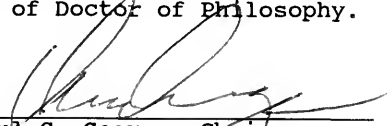Date _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Malmberg Yonek was born in Burien, Washington, in 1962. She was educated in Highline Public Schools in Seattle, and graduated from high school in 1979. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in history from the University of Puget Sound in 1984. Over the next several years, she attended various colleges part-time in order to earn endorsements in the subject areas of mathematics and language arts.

During 1985, Mary worked as an alternative-education teacher for Educational Clinics Incorporated, a private program for at-risk students. She was responsible for student advisement and instruction in mathematics, social studies, and language arts. In 1986, Mary taught eighth-grade social studies at Gray Junior High in Tacoma, Washington. From 1986-1988, she taught social studies, language arts, and mathematics at McKnight Middle School in Renton, Washington.

In 1989, Mary earned a Master of Education degree in educational leadership from the University of Florida. From 1988 to 1990, she worked as a graduate research assistant in the Department of Educational Leadership while

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completing coursework toward the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Mary served as an educational consultant in the area of alternative education for at-risk students during completion of her dissertation.
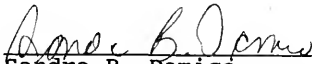
I certify that I have read this study and that in my
opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly
presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality,
as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

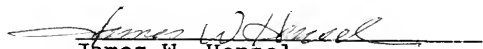Paul S. George, Chair
Professor of Educational
Leadership

I certify that I have read this study and that in my
opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly
presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality,
as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Sandra B. Damico
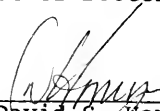Professor of Foundations of
Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my
opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly
presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality,
as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

James W. Hensel
Professor of Educational
Leadership

I certify that I have read this study and that in my
opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly
presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality,
as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

David S. Honeyman
Associate Professor of
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of the College of Education and to the Graduate
School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May, 1992

David E Smith

Dean, College of Education

Dean, Graduate School